

CLIFF FORSTER

Interviewed by: G. Lewis Schmidt

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Q: Cliff, I'm going to ask you to start by giving us the background on where you came from, what your general education was, and how it was that you got into the US Information Agency.

FORSTER: Fine Lew. First let me give you a hearty "aloha" here in Hawaii and welcome you to our island paradise. It's very good to have you here with us, and I shall do my best to respond to your questions.

Biosketch

I might begin by simply pointing out that I was born in Asia, actually in the Philippines, in Manila, in 1924. My father was sent out to Manila in 1923 to manage the American Red Cross operation there. Concurrently, he had the position of field director for the American Red Cross in the Far East, so that through the years, I was able to travel with him to China and Japan during a very interesting but critical period, the period of the Sino-Japanese undeclared war.

Father, during those years, was trying to bring about a closer working relationship between the American, Chinese, and Japanese Red Cross societies, to assist non-combatants and to evacuate non-combatants from critical areas. He worked on the Tokyo earthquake before he came out and was very well received by the Japanese Red Cross when he came through. All that by way of background.

A.Wartime Internment By Japanese Army

I spent most of my boyhood in the Philippines and elsewhere in the Far East, mostly China and Japan, and when the Japanese occupied the Philippines we were interned by them first at the Santo Tomas camp in Manila, and later at the Los Banos camp in the southern Philippines.

Q: I have several questions about your internment. First of all, were you interned as an entire family? Secondly, I would like to know what kind of treatment you got in the camp. Were you mistreated, other than having short rations, which were partly the fault of the Japanese and partly just general wartime conditions? Or did you have some severe treatment in the camp?

FORSTER: Yes, Lew, to answer your first question, we were all interned as a family. If you recall that occupation, it came very fast. The Japanese actually invaded the Philippines, the 14th Army, under General Masaharu Homma, in late December. But from December 8th on they had complete control of the skies. Our planes, including the newly-arrived B-17s, were caught on the ground at Clark Field. Our P-40s simply could not take on the Zero fighters. We were in a bad way. And yet MacArthur's forces held on valiantly, trying to stem that tide. There were two major invasions, one at the Lingayen Gulf to the west, the other on the Lamon Bay side to the east, and it was a pincers movement on Manila.

So almost until the week Manila was declared an open city, which was just about Christmas Day, those of us in the civilian community had actually been led to believe that we were holding the line. We were told that everyone should stay in Manila, keep calm and stay off the main highways. We then could see the trucks coming through from the south in large numbers with American troops speeding north. We did not know they were on their way to Bataan, this deployment to escape capture and surrender in Manila.

Homma's objective was to take Manila, and he had been given his orders by general headquarters in Tokyo to capture MacArthur in fifty days' time. Of course, he did not due to MacArthur's strategic move into the Bataan peninsula. That conflict went on until Corregidor fell in early May of 1942.

Back to Manila, to get to your question. On December 30th, we were all instructed to move from our homes, to go into selected hotels, and the one we were all put into, about a thousand of us, was the Bay View Hotel, which still is there, across from the American Embassy. The United States High Commissioner, Francis Sayre, by that time had gone with MacArthur to Corregidor. The President of the Philippines, Manuel Quezon, had also gone to Corregidor. We had no knowledge of all this. We knew that something was happening, because Manila had suddenly been declared an open city by MacArthur, and there was a large banner over the city hall declaring Manila was now an open city. We tried to reason that out. It was obvious to us it was an open city and that meant the Japanese could come in at any time. And they did. They came in the day after New Year's Eve.

Now, on December 31st, New Year's Eve, I accompanied by father down to the military pier, Pier 1, for the evacuation of the last, most severely wounded Americans and Filipinos aboard an old inter-island ship, the Mactan. Very little is known about this first mercy ship of World War II. My father was instructed by MacArthur to get the wounded out of Sternberg Hospital which was a military hospital right in Manila, and he didn't want to have them captured by the Japanese. So about the only boat that was still afloat was this old inter-island vessel which had been in the Battle of Jutland. In no time at all, he was able to get Filipinos together to paint that boat white and red crosses on the side.

On New Year's Eve, Manila was ringed by fires (we were submitting it to scorched earth tactics all the week before) and I went down with Dad to board the Mactan. You had the wounded from Lingayen and the fighting in the south and it was a very sad, very historical time. I remember the captain was a Filipino captain, Julian Tamayo. My father was concerned about his being able to clear the minefield at Corregidor. He asked Tamayo if he felt he could manage that all right, and Tamayo said, no problem, he had the US Navy charts, he'd get them through. His destination for the wounded was Sydney and the ship pulled slowly away from the pier just hours before the occupation of the city. My father had final clearance from the International Red Cross in Geneva. He never did get a response from then Prince Shimadzu, the director of the Japanese Red Cross in Tokyo, although Shimadzu had informed him earlier that they would respect this ship. Then there was silence.

At that point, mind you, the Japanese forces were just on the outskirts of Manila. We could hear the artillery firing. We watched the little ship move out across the bay that night. It was a dramatic sight, with the city on fire, this little white ship with the red crosses on the hull lit up with spotlights.

My dad never knew until he returned to the States-he was later exchanged aboard the Gripsholm-whether that ship had managed to get through. It was always on his mind. They did make it. They had a few close calls in the Celebes, but Captain Tamayo got the Mactan limping into Sydney and the Aussies were up on the bridge singing "Waltzing Matilda," a tremendous welcome to the survivors who managed to get through on that ship.

That's getting away from your question, but I just wanted to share some of that background, because you have to realize the suddenness of the whole thing, how quickly it hit us.

Q: I've never heard most of this story. I think it will be a very interesting addition to the interview.

FORSTER: Well, it's one that I've been trying to write up in this manuscript which I hope to finish fairly soon. There are so many untold stories like this which I do feel should be told. I'm glad to have this opportunity to tell this one, because it was a very moving story, indeed.

On January 1st, we could hear the firing very close to the city. Of course, the ship had cleared Corregidor by that time. On the afternoon of January 2nd, the first troops rolled in. They were all on motorbikes, most of them. All I could think of was Genghis Khan and the Mongol hordes. They had these backflaps like the Foreign Legion, and rifles strapped on their backs. You could see they'd been through a lot, because they were all dusty and mud-covered. They had Japanese flags on the bikes, but you heard this roar in the distance as they came in, just thousands of them on these motor bikes coming up what was then Dewey Boulevard. They were followed by tanks. Tanks rumbled in all night. I witnessed all this from the Bay view Hotel with my father and Carl Mydans, the Life photographer who was also in the hotel, and Shelley, his wife, as the Japanese moved into what was then the High Commissioner's residence, where our Embassy and USIS are now, hauling down the stars and stripes and hauling up the rising sun. So that was the end of our era in the Philippines, and we were just numb from all of this. It happened so fast.

The next thing we knew, we were being rounded up and informed that we were "under the benevolent custody of the Japanese Imperial Army," and had nothing to be concerned about. So they put us in these trucks and took us to this old university, then the oldest under the American flag, the University of Santo Tomas. For the next several days, the Allied internees were pouring in from all around the city. There was complete chaos, in a way, because the Japanese had no supplies there for us. Their primary objective was hot pursuit of the American forces moving into the Bataan peninsula, and they could care less about us, except to throw us into this camp.

My father's doctors and nurses were all Filipinos who did a fabulous job by us. He told them to go to the warehouses around Manila, where there was a lot of cracked wheat, which my father actually was in charge of for transshipment to Chungking via the Burma road. The ships never made it, since they were bombed in the harbor. But they did get the cargo of cracked wheat ashore, so we had sacks and sacks of cracked wheat. It was amazing how the Filipino staff, with all the turmoil and everything going on, were able to get all that cracked wheat into camp, along with some milk supplies, enough to keep us going for a while until the Japanese finally decided they would give us a regular diet of Mongo beans-pretty healthy stuff then-and rice, occasionally one banana. That was about it. Much of it was pretty wormy.

Then they told us we could farm this small garden that was behind the university, and I was on that detachment, I remember. We just all went to work. Some of us became gardeners, other became garbage collectors, and handled the food line and the cooking. All of a sudden you had these Manila senior executives-it was a great leveling process, because they were all engaged in work of this kind. We even put on skits to entertain the camp. One of them I recall was the tune of "Oh, Take Me Back to My Little Grass Shack," but it went something like this: "Oh, take me back to my little air-conditioned flat in old Manila/Where that rinky-hinky-dinky-stinky town of mine goes by/Oh, I used to be a teller in Manila's leading bank/But now I'm cleaning out a septic tank." And on and on it went. We had a lot of fun with these skits and it was good for camp morale.

I think one thing that got us through the years that followed was a sense of humor and the American ability to organize themselves. We had more doggone committees in that camp to do this and that, which kept us busy. We organized our own school. I was in my last year of high school when the war started, about to graduate, preparing to come to the US to college, so we had our graduation in that camp. The class gift to the principal was a roll of toilet paper since it was hard to come by. Things moved on under very difficult conditions, but we managed to all pull together.

Now, on treatment. I think I've already indicated that the initial treatment, when they came in, was quite good. They were on their good behavior. As time went on and the tide turned in the South Pacific the situation changed. I recall it was about August of '42 after the Battle of the Coral Sea. All their defeats were played up in their propaganda output as tremendous victories. All you heard was their side of the story. They reported they would soon be in Australia and were pushing us back in the Solomons and winning. The aircraft carrier Lexington had been sunk. It looked pretty dismal, because they also gave us very detailed reports on what they had sunk right here in Pearl Harbor. MacArthur's forces would soon be defeated on Bataan and Corregidor. Then you had Singapore and Hong Kong going under and the Battle of the Java Sea. In our Asiatic Fleet, the flagship USS Houston had been sunk in the Sunda Straits. Our old favorite destroyers, World War I-class four stackers, the Edsall, the Bulmer, the John Paul Jones, many of those ships also went down in the Battle of the Java Sea. It looked pretty bad. We thought, "This is a rough time. We're going to be here for a long, long time."

As time went on, we did encounter rough treatment. We had this case of two Australians and a New Zealander-one of them was in our room-who attempted to escape early on in February of '42. They were caught just beyond the gate and returned to the camp. We were brought down to witness their torture. They were summarily shot at close range. The effect of this on the camp was devastating. As a matter of fact, we were cautioned by older and wiser people in camp not to do anything to provoke the Japanese at that point. The shipmates of two of these fellows were ready to rush the Japanese, and they were held back. "If you do that, they're going to fire on everyone." This was a tank crew, a very rough crew that was on guard duty down in the front, and we were terribly concerned there would be bloodshed. Emotions were running very high. Well, there were a number of incidents like this. Of course, as time went on, they increased.

I would like to say this, however, and it's something that influenced my thinking about entering USIS years later. Our treatment would fluctuate depending on who was the commandant. If the commandant had had any kind of contact with us, had either lived in the States or studied under our missionaries, in Japan, in other words, a long association, the treatment was much better. Those commandants who had had no contact-and many of these chaps were younger-who had been fed this line of hate, that we were the enemy and to be destroyed and so on, the treatment from these fellows was very severe. In the second camp we were sent to, Los Banos, we experienced this. It was a very nasty time, indeed. We experienced so many things there, some of it sad and tragic, some of it rather funny in a way. It's amazing how you remember the funnier things and not so many of the sad things.

We had one commandant, for example, whom we called "Porky" and he had this long cigarette holder. He was terribly upset one evening, I guess with good cause, because this camp was right on the side of Mt. Makiling and we had decided we were going to put on our first play. I was selected for a very minor part. I don't know if you remember the play "Arsenic and Old Lace."

Q: Yes.

FORSTER: Boris Karloff played the part that I played in this scene, and he doesn't have much to say. The character was slightly off his rocker, as you may recall, the older brother of two old maids who were pretty much into the wine and knocking off their guests with arsenic. He would always come running down the stairs, thinking he was at the Battle of San Juan Hill, shouting, "Charge!" That was about my only big line and I really rehearsed it. We had put up this loudspeaker and we never thought about the ramifications of this thing. But when my turn came, I gave a very lusty "Charge!" and the guards at the gate knew that command, as did our commandant, "Porky". So there was a great deal of consternation, and suddenly the guards were up around the shack where we were broadcasting this for the camp and stopped everything in a hurry. We were brought up to explain what this was all about, and we assured the commandant that there was no attempt to communicate this command to anyone beyond the camp. (Laughter)

We had a wonderful guy as an interpreter, who had served for many years with Singer Sewing Machine in Japan before his capture in Manila. I don't recollect his name now, but I think you might have known him later in Tokyo since he returned there in the post-war years. He did a beautiful job of explaining the content of the play to our humorless commandant. Finally, "Porky" said, "All right, but don't do it again," and proceeded to close down the whole operation. (Laughter) No more plays for this camp.

Q: So your thespian career was cut rather short.

FORSTER: Cut very short, indeed.

The other experience which was some indication of their own problems took place when we were ordered to build additional quarters in X number of days because they wanted to get all the Allied personnel out of Manila. Tojo had come to Manila and we were told that he'd been very upset by the presence of so many Allied internees right in the heart of the city. This was not good. Of course, a number of Filipinos were in contact with us feeding us information on what was going on through clandestine radio and so on. He just did not want to have any kind of contact and Los Banos was in an isolated area far from Manila.

So they gave us inadequate materiel to construct this camp, and my boss-supervisor was a Scot, a very crusty Scot, and he just pointed out, "It ain't gonna work. The first typhoon that's going to come through here will blow it all down." We sent in this report to the commandant, pointing out the nature of the problem. He came back and emphatically told us, "Continue on. Build this camp." Sure enough, the first typhoon came through, and you've never seen such a mess. Only about two or three of these buildings were still standing. We had built just a few at that time. But most of them were flat.

The commandant had lost much face, of course, so he gathered us all on the baseball field. There was a chap beside him, sitting with his head down, and he told us, all of us who were assembled there, that the engineer responsible for the design and materiel for this camp, was not a Japanese. He was a Korean. He then pointed to this fellow sitting there alongside him as the real culprit. Of course, we guffawed since it was obvious that he was trying to pass the buck to this poor Korean in the Japanese Army. I don't know where they found him. I guess they just pulled him in to point the finger. And there were some "boos." (Laughter) This was just a little anecdote to give you some idea of the frame of mind at that time, too.

So that, I hope, answers your question about treatment to illustrate how it was fairly good in the beginning, but became more difficult as time went on.

B.1943: Repatriation-Japanese Shipping To Portuguese Goa, Then Gripsholm To The States

Q: How long were you interned?

FORSTER: I was interned until the fall of '43, when a number of us were rounded up and told to proceed to Santo Tomas for a prisoner exchange. When I arrived at Santo Tomas I saw my mother and father for the first time. They had been under house arrest ever since he had had a heart attack in the camp in Manila.

We joined the Manila group and were taken up to Lingayen Gulf where we boarded the Teia Maru which had been the Aramis, a French ship captured in Saigon when the war started. It was still war-time gray although it did have some red crosses on the hull. It had not been painted white, however, a requirement for exchange vessels. The ship picked up the first exchangees in Japan at Yokohama. It then proceeded to Shanghai, Hong Kong and Lingayen Gulf since the ship couldn't come into Manila Bay because we still had the minefield problem there. Then it went upriver to Saigon, where we picked up the French, down to Singapore, through the Sunda Straits to Marmagao in what was then Portuguese Goa to be met there by the Gripsholm. The Japanese on the Gripsholm boarded the Teia maru as we went aboard the Gripsholm for the final voyage home.

We were next sent to Port Elizabeth, and from Port Elizabeth to Rio, where we were checked over from a health standpoint, interrogated for what we knew about the Japanese situation in Manila, our own treatment, the kind of questions you've just been asking. When we arrived in New York we received a very fine welcome with fire boats coming alongside. That was December 1, 1943, I believe.

Q: When we were off tape, incidentally, you mentioned that there were two Gripsholm repatriations, a first and a second one. I guess most of the ranking people came out from Japan on the first one.

FORSTER: That's right. It was a diplomatic exchange.

Q: Ambassador Alex Johnson?

FORSTER: Correct. Also Ambassador John Allison.

Q: And Allison. You did not go out on the first one; you went out on the second one?

FORSTER: The second one. The second Gripsholm was primarily for diplomats, but of lesser rank from these different places. There were also Red Cross-affiliated officials, which included my father, foreign correspondents, like Carl and Shelley Mydans of Time-Life, Royal Arch Gunnison of Collier's, Emily Hahn from Hong Kong, smoking her famous cigar on the deck, as I recall. Quite a person, indeed. And a number of missionaries. There were other categories, but that was primarily it. I think some of the officers and crew of ships that had been sunk were also on that exchange like the President Harrison, which was seized while trying to escape from China. Most of the exchangees, however, were diplomatic and Red Cross personnel, journalists and missionaries. And they were matched with Japanese in those categories coming in the other direction.

C. New York: Extensive Debriefing By Naval Intelligence And Later In Washington

Q: So after you got to New York, what transpired after that?

FORSTER: We had been asked to submit anything we had in our possession on the Japanese occupation in these different countries. I had spent some time, since when you're three months at sea, you have a lot of time so I had pulled together as much as I could recall from the Japanese newspaper coverage, their propaganda, their version of what was going on, not only in the Philippines but elsewhere in the Pacific. And then I also pulled together as much information as I could recall on how they had taken over the Philippine government, created this puppet regime, put the former Quezon official, Jose Laurel, into the position, who was the father of Salvador Laurel now Vice President under Cory Aquino. I had a good deal of data. Much of this was recall, but I also managed to bring out some of the actual material. The Japanese put out edicts from time to time on what they were doing during their occupation. I had no problem getting some of that out. I figured it was theirs, so if they found it, I was just taking some of their own material back. Anyhow, they didn't find it. I turned all that over in my report to Naval Intelligence representatives on arrival in New York.

I was later called down to Washington as a follow-up to that report. They had more questions. I also pulled together what I knew from the time in Santo Tomas and Los Banos on the Japanese, what buildings they occupied, where they were in the port city at Manila, what the atmospherics were like. I was able to get out of camp only on one occasion to see my father, but I was also sent out of camp on work details. The Japanese would take us down to unload ships, for example, a forced-labor kind of thing. So as we would go through the streets of Manila, we could see pretty much where they were and what they were doing. I was always very curious about the propaganda signs they had around and what message they were trying to get across to the Filipinos.

So all of that was in this report which I turned over to them. I guess that's the report that caught up with me later and was responsible for my being assigned to Washington after joining the Navy. I went through boot training up at Farragut, Idaho and was selected for naval air when they cut that program back. It was getting late in the war. I was then sent to Millington, Tennessee to the naval air training center there, for training as an aerial gunner until they found that I had peripheral vision

My next assignment was to Algiers near New Orleans, where I was trained for amphibious work and sent out to Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay to stand by to board the attack transport USS Goodhue. I was very pleased about this because MacArthur was closing in on the Philippines and I wanted very much to get back in time for the liberation.

However, in late September, an order came in to proceed directly to Washington, DC to the OP-16W branch of naval intelligence under the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). This branch was engaged not only in the psychological warfare side of the Navy's operations, but also with the analysis of Japanese captured documents, interrogating our own people who were coming back from the Pacific, and this included personnel who were coming out of the Philippines as coastal watchers who had gone in earlier by submarine. We also interrogated our prisoners who had been able to escape for information on Japanese defense capabilities and POW conditions in the various camps.

Then, just prior to the occupation in October of '44, I was assigned the task of producing as much information as I could on the Southern Philippines and what areas I knew about that might be friendly or unfriendly, this kind of thing. I ended up just before Japan's surrender working with a group that was assisting Admiral Ellis Zacharias, who was making a valiant effort to reach the Japanese by radio targeting those he had known when he was a naval attaché in Tokyo before the war, to try and get them to realize the jig was up. He was also targeting the Imperial Household, contacts he had had, and the foreign service officers he had known, like Kase, for example. Some of those messages did get through, and it was a last-minute appeal to try to make them realize that to surrender would be a very good thing for them and for us. We found out after the war that many of his messages did get through. Those broadcasts, if you read them today are very well-crafted with the audience in mind; they are polite, but firm, the kind of language the Japanese would respect. He spoke fluent Japanese and we were later told that they were well received by the Japanese who did hear them. It was really a last-minute attempt to get through to the moderate leadership close to the Emperor. These broadcasts, which he worked on day and night, were from KGEI station in San Francisco and then relayed here in Hawaii to Japan, I understand.

So that's where I was working with ONI at the time of the dropping of the bomb. We were in the old Stewart Chevrolet Building on K and 12th in Washington very much out of sight.

D.Comments on Philippine's Collaboration With Japanese

Q: You had also mentioned, when we were off the tape, that you were asked to do some analyzing of the matter of Philippine collaboration with the Japanese. Would you say a few words about that, as to why you thought certain of the Filipinos collaborated with the Japanese? Was this because of self-interest, or were they really convinced that the Japanese were good for them? Were they friendly with them? What were the various reasons for their collaboration? And particularly some of the high leaders, why did they collaborate?

FORSTER: That was a very sensitive and complex issue as the war came to an end, and it still is, since the sons and daughters today of these so-called war-time collaborators are still with us in key positions in the Philippines. One of them I've already mentioned was Jose Laurel. His son Salvador is now vice president to Cory Aquino. The senior Laurel was selected by the Japanese Military to be the puppet president in 1943. The popular Benigno Aquino Jr., who was shot down on arrival at the Manila airport in 1983, is another case in point. His father was also on the "collaborator list" at the war's end. General Manuel Roxas, who became President after the war, was also accused of collaboration until exonerated. When I say "collaborator list" I should mention that it had been prepared for review by various agencies in Washington. Were they or were they not collaborators? It was a tough one, because we were still in the heat of the conflict and emotions were running high against those Filipinos who had occupied positions of authority under the Japanese. An important point to recognize here is that the Japanese military leaders made the decisions and these former officials in the Quezon government were, in effect, told that they should create a government to keep things going.

Quezon, in his memoirs after the war, pointed out that these men were doing what they had to do, that many of them acted as buffers between the Japanese occupiers and the Filipino people to protect them. But there were others in our government and in our military, when we went back in, who felt very strongly that some of them had gone too far and did not need to come out with some of the pro-Japanese statement they made at the time.

If you recall, when MacArthur was coming back into Lingayen Gulf in January of 1945, and pushing on Manila, the Japanese flew the top leaders of the Philippine puppet regime to Tokyo from Baguio. By that time General Yamashita had already retreated to the north Luzon area. So it was a case of getting all of them out in a hurry. You will recall also that the Japanese had granted Philippines independence under this puppet regime. That was all part of their game.

The collaboration issue bothered us very much and the question was: What do we do about this issue? The different departments were required to work on this issue in Washington-Navy, Army OSS and, of course, State-compiling as much information as we could on those accused of collaboration and the whole background of the collaboration issue.

I can say now, 45 years later, that as I went through this material and examined it and recalled these leaders and my father's association with a number of them before the war, many were very honorable men for whom there had been great respect. Roxas was later vindicated as were others. Those who were cleared early on had been cleared because there was good evidence that they had done this to protect their own people. Their role was an exceedingly difficult one. Those who did not come through as well, had made extreme anti-American statements, or had written in defense of the Japanese war mission, and it was obvious that they were basically pro-Japanese in their sentiment. For example, there was one Filipino organization called the Makapili which was very pro-Japanese, and used for propaganda and fifth column activity when the Japanese were advancing on Manila.

There was also this strong nationalist kind of feeling against so-called "Western domination" before the war and this frequently motivated anti-western or American statements among some Filipinos, particularly journalists and authors. It was very similar to Sukarno, for example, in Indonesia, or indeed to Ne Win and his group in Burma, where they saw the Japanese as a way, first, to move against the "Western colonials" to take over and create their own independent administration. With these individuals the Japanese were the lesser of the two evils.

In the Philippines, however, we all felt we were much better off compared to the other Western colonies. We had already made it clear that with the creation of the commonwealth government in 1935 under Quezon as the first president of that government, that full independence would be granted in July 1946, following this transition period. MacArthur had come out to train the Philippine Army in 1935 and things were in motion. So when suddenly you had this collaboration program during the war, it was a real emotional setback for many Americans and difficult to comprehend at first. Later it became clearer as we looked into the individual cases. So much of it was highly subjective from the outset and had to be analyzed more objectively from different points of view.

Q: I suppose it was rather difficult for you to tell, since you were interned so much of the time, whether or not there was any widespread collaboration on the part of the people who weren't prominent, just the underlying mass of the population, how they were reacting with and toward the Japanese.

FORSTER: I only have the greatest praise for the Filipino people, the large majority of them. Yes, there was a small minority who, for one reason or another, collaborated with them. But that was so rare and I cannot begin to tell you about the times they helped us out during the wartime years by dropping food parcels over the barbed wire fence for us, often at great risk, or getting news to us wrapped inside bottle labels, you know, this sort of thing. They did a great deal for us, caring for us as prisoners.

I remember the only time I was able to get a release out to see my father. The Japanese put a red band on you if you did get your release, and it had the character "bei" for rice-"bei koku" which meant "American." For some reason we were "the rice country" then. With the red band we were spotted by Filipinos right away. When I came out of the gate of Santo Tomas there were no taxis so we had to ride in caromatas or calesas which were horse-drawn vehicles. The drivers were all clamoring to have me as a passenger and I went in to town with this one fellow who filled me in on the latest news and how he felt about what was going on in the city. He said he could hardly wait until MacArthur returned and he had no love for the Japanese. It was very moving to listen to him and a boost to my morale.

I should also mention the strong resistance movement in the Philippines. There was no other country in Southeast Asia that had a resistance movement like that. It is an untold story, and I'm sure our colleague Jim Halsema has recounted some of this to you.

Q: No, he didn't say anything about the resistance.

FORSTER: It was a strong guerrilla movement made up of many groups. Some of these resistance groups were fighting against other resistance groups, of course. I mean, you had that kind of thing, too. But by and large, they had the Japanese on the move all the time, interdicting their lines and blowing up their trucks, assisting our shot-down flyers. You could go right into the city of Manila with their help. We had one Navy commander who went into Manila to get intelligence on Japanese positions. He was able to get right into the city, assisted by Filipinos. The great welcome to our troops when we came back into Manila was indicative again of their strong support. And if it had not been for guerrilla assistance in early '45, our camp at Los Banos would not have been rescued so successfully behind Japanese lines. The 11th Airborne parachuted into the camp for the rescue based on intelligence information from Filipino guerrillas in the region.

Probably the best example of the strong loyalty and support from the Philippine population was the death march following the Bataan surrender. Filipino losses were much greater than ours and we still do not have an accurate count of their losses both on that death march and during the fighting on Bataan. The Philippine Army losses were considerable. Many of them escaped and were able to get back into the hills where they fought alongside American escapees in these resistance movements. So I would say that this was one of the most exciting and moving times in terms of cooperation between two countries during a major conflict.

E.1946-48: Post-War Activity And Education

Q: I think that probably pretty well covers the Philippine side, at least during the war and immediately after. What happened after the war was over and the Japanese had surrendered, as far as you were concerned?

FORSTER: My father died just after the war in 1946. After my release from the Navy, I started at George Washington University in the School of International Relations, and then went west when my father passed away, and stayed on with my mother there and entered Stanford University, again majoring in international relations with the main concentration on Asian Studies, Southeast Asia, primarily.

My history advisor was Claude Buss, who had been in the Philippines with the High Commissioner as his executive assistant. Claude Buss is one of our leading authorities today on the Philippines. I met my wife Nancy in his class and he maintains he played Cupid. Claude is a very dear friend, and he had a great deal to do with my entering the Foreign Service. I was working on my master's at the time. It was 1948.

If you recall, the situation in the Philippines was very serious in 1948. During the war, you had had this "Hukbalahap" movement which had fought the Japanese very effectively, but the leaders, many of them, were pro-communist. Jim Halsema knows a great deal about this Huk movement. I think he was an AP correspondent at the time he interviewed the leader, Luis Taruc. Taruc organized this "People's Army to Fight the Japanese," which is what "Hukbalahap" translates into.

[Elpidio] Quirino was the president of the Philippines at the time, and there was widespread corruption. Also, the elections were run very poorly. You had a situation developing where the Huks told the people that "It's bullets, not ballots if you want to really straighten things out in this country." Meanwhile, the Huks were closing in on the Manila area. They were also active in southern Luzon and were moving down into the Visayan Islands.

1949: Entrance Into Bureau of Public Affairs; Department of State

So I became very concerned about this situation, having lived most of my life in the Philippines, and I wanted to get out to the Philippines in a hurry. I was unable to get out for the liberation in 1944-45 because of this last-minute assignment to Washington in the Navy. So I went to Claude and I asked him, "What's the fastest way to get out there?" He suggested that I write to George Allen, who had been a former colleague of his in the Foreign Service. So I did. I also wrote to another person at his suggestion called Katherine Porter, who was in charge of the Philippine desk.

I received very nice letters from them informing me that they were opening up posts in the Philippines, and because of my experience there, they expressed interest in my application. Frankly, I wasn't quite sure what I was getting into at the time. All I knew was that I was joining the Foreign Service. It was not until I received all the information from them that I discovered I was reporting in to Mr. Allen who was then Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, in the Department of State.

So I went back east to take my oath of office in June and reported in to the Department in July.

Q: What year was this?

FORSTER: 1949. Keep in mind that China was going under at that time as Mao's forces moved north to defeat Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist armies. It was a pretty dismal situation out in Asia. The posts in China, our USIA posts, were folding one after another.

1949: Assignment As Branch Public Affairs Officer, Davao on Island of Mindanao; Country In Chaos; Huk Rebellion At Peak

Nancy and I were married in July, and I reported back to Washington with Nancy as my wife, and we were off to the Philippines in September where I opened the post of Davao on Mindanao in the southern Philippines, which had been the largest Japanese overseas colony before the war. They were growing hemp in that area and we had a large Japanese concentration there before the war. The ravages of war were still evident when we arrived in Davao. The hemp fields had been the scene of bitter fighting between our forces and the Japanese.

Our PAO was a fine man, James Meader, whom I believe you know. The deputy, who had been interned up the Chinese Communists in Nanking just before that, was Harry Hudson. Earl Wilson and John Henderson had just opened the Regional Publications Center there. Manila was then one of our major posts in Asia and it was also our major counterinsurgency post at the time because of the Huk threat. We were confronted with a real challenge and conditions were difficult for us in the provinces.

We had some very fine people out there in the outposts that were being opened up. As I say, I opened Davao with responsibility for the Mindanao-Sulu region. Cebu had already been opened, and Bob McKinnon, a State Department officer, who later died in Ouagadougou, was there. Then our mutual friend Russ Lynch came into Iloilo, and after him, Jerry Novick, whom you also remember well. Milt Leavitt went into Legaspi. We had a large operation, as I recall now. In the northern area of Luzon, we had posts in Laoag and Tuguegarao. We also had one in San Fernando. All were manned by American officers.

There was a lot of unrest in different parts of Mindanao while we were there with Huk infiltration and the Moro or Moslem uprisings in the area. We had a fairly good-sized staff. It was an exciting time for both Nancy and myself, because at that time both husband and wife were very much involved in the work. You had to be. She would go with me on our mobile unit trips with our films and publications to reach the distant areas. She also helped on office chores, taught English and entertained constantly.

I should also mention that it was pretty rough politically under the Quirino regime. Voters were being beaten up at the polls if they did not vote for the party in power. What little democracy existed was going under fast along with the economy and the communist-led Huks were making the most of it.

Q: This is the government?

FORSTER: That's right. The Quirino administration, with the help of some of the constabulary and Philippine Army elements were violating the constitutional rights of the people. As time went on, however, many of the Philippine Army leaders and the constabulary were opposed to this kind of autocratic rule, but in the early years you had Quirino in charge with his political hooligans.

The answer to so much of the problem was Ramon Magsaysay, the Defense Minister in the Quirino government. He launched a movement to curb these excesses. He was a great leader and I wish he were still around. He was remarkable, going right out to the provinces to work with the disaffected, and promising the Huks that if they surrendered they would be given a piece of land in Mindanao to start fresh. He set up two very successful resettlement projects for surrenderees, one in northern Mindanao and another in Cotabato, southern Mindanao.

The whole operation was unusual in a way, because USIS was tasked with the job of providing information materials on the conduct of good government and how to educate voters on democratic processes including polling. We were sent around to give talks on these democratic procedures and to provide information on organizing groups modeled after the League of Women Voters. We even went into the camps where the Huk surrenderees were located to assist on the re-education program. At the same time, information support was provided which could be used to counter the influence of the Huks as they moved towards Manila and other cities.

Looking back on that period, I would say that we were quite successful. We were working with so many good people, so many Filipinos who felt strongly about what was going on in the Philippines not only with a corrupt regime but also with an insurgency capitalizing on this corruption and the deterioration of the economy. We were involved in nation-building in a very real sense, in a country we had administered for many years and where Americans and Filipinos had fought and died together against the invaders in World War II. We were there only three or four years after the war and Manila, as you may remember from your own experience, was still in shambles. Davao was that way, too, when we arrived there in 1949 as were so many of the cities. But we were working with Filipinos who had served on Bataan and Corregidor and who had been on the Death March. We had a common experience and we did not want to see a newly-independent nation succumb to a totalitarian rule of the right or left. On my staff I had several ex-Philippine Scouts and fighters in the wartime resistance movement who were outstanding. We just had so much going for us at that time and I believe we contributed to the success of Magsaysay's effort to turn things around. When Magsaysay was finally elected President in a free election, we all felt, Americans and Filipinos, that we had entered a new era of freedom and democracy in the Philippines!

Q: I want to discuss Magsaysay a little later, but I also want to ask you a couple of questions. The period you're describing now has been described from somewhat different angles by three of the other people I've interviewed. In the case of Milt Leavitt, when he was interned by the Japanese, several of the Filipinos who were interned with him later turned up in the Hukbalahap forces. He had the peculiar experience of having some of these people come to his office when he was Branch PAO and saying, "Look. We aren't going to hurt you and aren't going to hurt the Americans as long as you don't do certain things. Don't go out there and really get tough. But we don't have any objection to your showing these films of how to build the nation."

Then another thing that was brought up by Jim Halsema, Jim felt that Taruc was certainly a convinced communist, but that he was a convinced communist and nationalist, that he was not of the Chinese or Russian type of communist.

FORSTER: I think Jim's right.

Q: Taruc was a nationalist who had become convinced of the communist cause, but was not the puppet of those people. In that respect, the Huk insurgency differs very greatly from the group carrying out the insurgency now. Does this pretty much square with your...

FORSTER: Yes, it does except that the Huks-like the NPA-were frequently guided by Marxist doctrine and could be pretty ruthless. At the time I went out to the Philippines, Luis Taruc was labeled as a communist as was his right hand man, Mateo del Castillo. I recall that Halsema had interviewed Taruc just after the war. But many of them were socialists first with a strong sense of nationalism. There had been an active socialist movement before the war and there were legitimate grievances since little had been done on agrarian reform and poverty was widespread among the farmers. The NPA or New Peoples' Army is a far more radical organization in the Philippines today in very much the same way as the Sekigun or Red Army differs from the earlier Zengakuren movement in Japan.

In regard to Milt's experience, although I never experienced a situation like his, I find it most interesting. I do know of cases where Filipinos sided with the Huks because of agrarian unrest and their desire to do something about it. Agrarian reform was-and still is-a vital need in the Philippines. It remains a major issue for the Philippines today. They have not been able to get on top of agrarian discontent and it's a case of the very rich landowners and these very poor peasants who have been exploited through the years.

It's quite likely, I'm sure, that the Philippine veterans returning to Central Luzon after the war, where so much of this agrarian ferment existed, saw the Huks as a way of taking action, and they joined them in many cases, I would guess, not because of any deep communist sympathy but rather as a way to bring about change. A good example of this in recent years have been young Catholic priests who have gone up into the mountains to join the NPA. They see them as the lesser of two evils. If you are going to fight against corruption and agrarian discontent, you join this movement and this accounts for much of the present strength of the NPA.

Q: Were you still in the Philippines when Magsaysay was elected?

FORSTER: No. I had been transferred to Yale University for Japanese language training and then out to Japan where you and I first met in 1953. I was in Kobe as a regional public affairs officer when Magsaysay crashed into the side of a mountain on Cebu, and that was a terrible shock to so many of us who had been in the Philippines-Jerry Novick, Russ Lynch, Stan Moss, and Milt Leavitt. I assume Jim Halsema was also distressed by the news although I don't think Jim was there at the time.

Q: He had left.

FORSTER: All of us who had known of the sensitivities, the charisma and the leadership of that man were devastated when we heard the news of his early ending. The Philippines desperately needs that kind of leadership today. I have great respect for Cory Aquino, but Magsaysay was tough and he went out to the people. He was going to do something about agrarian reform. Had he lived long enough, I think we would have seen some substantial changes. It's one of the great tragedies of history, I think, Lew.

Q: I feel the same way. I was in the hospital recovering from polio, of course, at the time.

FORSTER: Yes, that's right.

Q: In March or April.

FORSTER: You were in Rio?

Q: No, I had been in Rio and had gotten polio. This was in March or April of 1957 when he was killed. I was recovering from polio in Harborview Hospital's Respirator Center in Seattle at that time.

FORSTER: In a way he was a Philippine Kennedy who had a great impact on all of us. He really wanted to do something for his people.

Q: On the other hand, there are some people who say that both Magsaysay and Kennedy had their reputations preserved and enhanced by having their lives cut short, because they might not have been so successful.

FORSTER: We'll never know, but both leaders will never be forgotten for their leadership at the time.

Many of us in the USIS Philippine program went on over to Saigon, as you may recall, and to Bangkok because of our counter-insurgency experience. The PAO in Manila, James Meader was also sent into Southeast Asia if I recall correctly. I was one of the few, along with Russ Lynch, who was sent in another direction-to Japan.

Q: I don't remember whether Meader went into Southeast Asia at that time. I might mention here that Meader and I were classmates together in the first Far Eastern course for military government at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville during World War II.

FORSTER: Oh, is that right?

Q: He was taken out of the program about the end of the first month in Stanford. He and I both went to Stanford for follow-on training (Japanese language and area study) after Charlottesville. He was put in one of the Philippine civil affairs teams that went in with MacArthur when he liberated the Philippines in October of 1944.

FORSTER: He was a fine man. You know the school he started here in downtown Honolulu after his retirement, the Hawaii Pacific University, is going like gangbusters now, and the Library is named after him. I don't know whether you've seen it.

Q: I haven't been in it.

FORSTER: His legacy is very much here in Hawaii.

Q: When was it that you went into language training at Yale?

FORSTER: I was among the guinea pigs when they were using that old system, where they would give you just a quick area kind of study at FSI and then put you into a university. In my case, I was sent to Yale for a year of language study, but it had been combined with area and evaluation studies. My last assignment in the Philippines had been to evaluate our program. I was called in by Dr. Meader to head up an evaluation team to take a good hard look at what kind of success we had had with our activities and our output in countering the Huk insurgency propaganda. Some of that study was picked up by Wilbur Schramm later in his book. I forget the title now. But we had a good team working on that project. Lou Gleeck came out from the Voice of America to help us on the evaluation procedures. Doak Barnett, the well-known author and Chinese specialist, was then USIS evaluation officer in Hong Kong. He came down to Manila, too. So we worked on this together. Stan Moss, then assigned as BPAO in Cebu, was a member of my team in USIS. We went around asking questions to try to get as many answers as we could. It was a fascinating three-months study. We analyzed the final results in Washington.

Summer 1952: Language Training At Yale Followed By (1953) Assignment To Japan

Q: So you went to Yale between when and when?

FORSTER: I went to Yale in the summer of '52 and came out of that program using the Eleanor Jordan's texts in '53.

Q: Had Eleanor already gone to Yale?

FORSTER: She had left for Japan but we used her books. It was known at Yale as the "Yale system" developed by the linguistic team of Bernard Bloch and Jordan during the war, I believe.

Q: The reason I ask is that when I got to Japan in January of '52-

FORSTER: She was heading the Embassy Japanese Language school, wasn't she?

Q: She was head of the school up there. Not only that, but she was the one who wrote the course that I studied in the Military Government School at Stanford in 1944-45. So I immediately signed up and took language three mornings a week for two hours each morning for the first year and a half I was there, to bring my Japanese back again. But I can't remember just when she left for Japan.

FORSTER: It must have been just before I went to Yale, because there were three of us assigned to the Japanese program by the State Department (USIS was still under State then). Three other State officers were in that program, one in Vietnamese and two in Chinese. Sam Martin was the over-all director. He had gone through the Jorden program, too. Nancy used to say, during that time and since, that the only other woman in my life has been Eleanor Jorden, because for a whole year all she could hear in the next room was Eleanor and I talking to each other using her language tapes in New Haven.

Q: Eleanor was Eleanor Hartz at the time she was writing the stuff we were using in Stanford in '44. We were just one length behind her. Sometimes our next level of the course was hung up because she was a week late in getting through with the next issue of the studies. It was give and take all the time.

FORSTER: The problem with our system, Lew, at Yale-and we all had to write a critique of it later when we arrived in Tokyo-was that we had the language only one-third of the time. Another third went into area study (political, historical, cultural, etc.) which was pretty heady stuff, studying under scholars like Yanaga, Lasswell, Northrup, Rowe and Doob, among others. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. But it didn't help your Japanese language. A final third of the time was devoted to evaluation studies in my case since USIS hoped to do more in this field.

So when I submitted my report, I said I thought it was unfortunate that my State colleagues could go on for another year studying Japanese in Japan. I guess the school was in Yokohama. No, it was still in Tokyo then. But then they went out into a Japanese community. I felt that another year of intensive language would have been very helpful before going into the job, but I was told at the time that there was a real need for all of us to open up these new posts with the signing of the peace treaty with Japan in '52.

Q: At that time the problem was that people who had been there with the occupation, several of whom we took over for a short period of time ranging up to a year or a year and a half, after we took over in the end of April 1952, were phasing out and going home. We had to find replacements for these people who had been there for probably several years under a slightly different program, a much less intensive one than the USIA one. Now they were leaving, and we wanted to fill those posts. I remember about ten of them becoming vacant at that time.

FORSTER: I guess I was one of them and I reported in to you, as a matter of fact. Ken Bunce was the evaluation officer as I recall, Sax Bradford was the Director of USIS in Japan and I reported in to him also. Sax had also been in the Navy Department in Washington while the war was on and I had met him there briefly. When I reported to him he made it very clear to me that I was to erase all vestiges of the army information program. "You're going to be taking over from this CIE program (civil information and education)." He had a thing about CIE I guess-

"And I want you to paint out all the CIE markings on the shelving and the desks and so on. This has got to be USIS now." (Laughter)

Q: He wanted to eliminate the military operation completely. It wasn't CIE per se; it was the Army he wanted to eliminate.

FORSTER: So we all went out to our posts gung-ho to eradicate CIE. But I'll tell you, once I got down to Matsuyama, Japan where I was hoping you would lose my personnel file, since it was such a delightful place, I could see right away that CIE had made a darn fine contribution. I mean, those libraries were really service libraries with a whole different concept in those days. They were actually community centers in every way. You had square dancing, for example, started I understand by a Colonel Niblo. The Virginia Reel was going on down below in the auditorium right into the night and I began to wonder, coming from this counterinsurgency program in the Philippines, "What am I getting into?" (Laughter) But boy, it was great, because I had not been interested at all in going into Japan and I was virtually told by Brad Connors, the East Asia Area Director, "This is it. You're going in."

I said, "Well, look. I had this experience during the war. I just don't know how I'll do there."

He said, "Well, that's all the more reason you should go in, because you're going to know both the minus and the plus side of these people." As it turned out, it was a great education for me as time went on, and I hope it was as useful for the Japanese in developing a greater understanding of America and the American people.

Q: You must have come in, then, sometime fairly near the middle of '52.

FORSTER: No, I arrived in Yokohama in July of 1953 and I recall it well since it was the Centennial of Commodore Perry's entrance into the bay with his "black ships" to open up Japan in 1853.

Q: So you got there to help celebrate the Centennial?

FORSTER: Right. And that was something else again, too. John Allison was our ambassador as you know.

Q: Back to CIE, I do want to say that I have a great admiration for what they did, as a matter of fact. I think that the old-style Army officer would not have done what MacArthur arranged to have done. Of the 24 centers which we took over from the Army, two were in Tokyo; one out at Shinjuku and one downtown. We soon closed the Shinjuku center, but we still had 23 for another year and a half or two years. But the Army did a really stupendous job, and despite Sax Bradford's antipathy to the military, I have nothing but admiration for what the CIE centers accomplished.

FORSTER: They did a great job.

Q: They got the Japanese involved in those centers and displayed a completely new concept of how to operate a library and what the US could do for them. So I don't have any adverse feeling about the CIE.

FORSTER: That concept is carried on today, you know. Those centers, of course, many of them are now run by the prefectures and the cities, and they still have the old name. "Cultural" as you know so well, is "bunka" in Japanese. They are still Bunka Centers. So the name has even caught on. It's a little-known story, isn't it? I think it's one of the exciting chapters of cultural relations that the institution has survived.

Most of the directors we took over from were women librarians, and they were fantastic. I was in shock at first-I guess we were a little more chauvinistic then-that I was taking over from a woman librarian as a Foreign Service officer. But years later when I was questioned about the advisability of sending in our first American officer, a woman officer, to Kyoto-and there was a lot of opposition to it in the Agency, I said, "No, no. Long ago these centers were run by absolutely outstanding women who were very well received and who have not been forgotten to this day."

Q: I would say that probably two-thirds to three-quarters of those centers were run by women during the occupation.

FORSTER: Oh, yes. Yes.

Q: There were a few men under CIE but very, very few.

FORSTER: Very few.

Q: Probably not more than six or eight. The rest were all run by women, who did a very good job.

FORSTER: I think our major problem going into Japan, particularly those of us who had the information officer background and where our previous assignments were in insurgency areas, was the problem of adjusting to this new role in an occupied country. We had specific policy objectives and country plans to work with. So we couldn't quite see the advantages of just the goodwill thing working out of a library in a broader cultural scene. But I'll tell you, in retrospect, that this was terribly important at the time. I mean, both should go together. There should be some kind of mix of the political and cultural, because we have a mission to do. I used to feel in later years that our program should be more balanced. It was much more than going in to pound the table on policy points of view without having that other kind of goodwill approach, the give and take of these libraries and the students in there using our books. I think that's one of the tragedies. But then I'm very out of date. I do feel that we've lost a lot in our centers in a way, not having them more open to the public than they are today.

Q: I think so, too.

FORSTER: There would be a lot of disagreement among some of my very good USIA colleagues on that one.

Q: We'll get back to that period.

FORSTER: That's a later period.

Q: You were preceded by Alan Carter as PAO in Tokyo some years later?

FORSTER: Oh yes. That's a long story.

Q: What did you see as your particular duties during your first assignments in Japan? What were your primary types of programming when you were in Matsuyama, for example?

FORSTER: Matsuyama was the first post. You may not recall, but you called me up one summer afternoon after I had been there a few months to say, "Cliff, pack up your bags with Nancy. You're being assigned to Fukuoka." I was really quite distressed because we loved that little castle town of Matsuyama.

Q: A lovely town.

FORSTER: Marvelous. We had that Center which had been built for us by Governor Hisamatsu who used to come over in the afternoons to join us for tea. It was a very unusual experience.

So the transfer to Fukuoka came as something of a blow, but I must say that was another great experience in Fukuoka, because you had the RPAO or regional public affairs officer concept then. I was RPAO for all Kyushu, which made it possible for me to work the entire area. We had four USIS centers when I arrived: Fukuoka, Nagasaki, Kumamoto and Kokura. In Matsuyama, I had served under a fine officer, Walter Nichols, you know him well from way back, who was RPAO (regional public affairs officer) in Kobe. Walt really knew the country, and his senior advisor who I also learned so much from was Naotada Kumagai. And you had David Osborn as political officer in Kobe who went on to be DCM in Tokyo and later served as our ambassador in Burma. Dick Ericson was in Osaka then, another top Japan specialist. It was a very professional crew and I had the great privilege, as a complete neophyte, coming in to work with them. And, of course, you were in Tokyo as Executive Officer. You were our main contact then, Lew, more than anyone else at headquarters, because you provided us with all that we needed to get the job done. We had great respect for you and the way you managed those posts.

It was also a time of great stress and strain. I'd only been in Matsuyama about two months when Walter called from Kobe and said, "Lou wants us all to get together to determine which posts are going to have to go in our regions." There was a marvelous field supervisor in Tokyo at the time, Pat Van Delden, and I recall that she always wore dark glasses at work. I guess she had a problem with her eyes but at first I found myself wondering if I had come into the wrong agency. You also had Bryan Batter still waiting for his center to open in Tokyo, and a great guy whom I'd known in the Philippines as a kid before the war. His name was Bill Graves and he was then running the center in Kanazawa. Bill, I notice, has just taken over as editor of National Geographic. Then there was Russ Lynch, whom I'd known with USIS in the Philippines. He was RPAO in Nagoya when I arrived in Japan.

So there were these familiar faces and many new faces as well. It was a very large operation in Tokyo and I found it rather frightening, having always been out in the field at small posts. But it was an exciting time, indeed, to go out to Japan with the occupation coming to an end following the signing of the peace treaty.

I think I strayed from your question.

Q: I asked what the thrust of your program was.

FORSTER: Fukuoka was a far more complex and difficult area to work in than Matsuyama, which was a rather laid-back agricultural town. Fukuoka had the large industrial area of Yawata with its steel mills and chemical plants. There were the strong leftist labor unions carrying out massive strikes in the depressed coal mining areas. There was also our large Itazuke air base with our jets flying over the university all the time resulting in more demonstrations. So you had one issue after another and a great deal of anti-American feeling.

We were all working together in the consulate in those days under the same roof. Owen Zurhellen had been the consul. He is here now, by the way, teaching at the University of Hawaii. Jim Martin took over from Owen. We had a very close working relationship and at that time we were still all State officers. I had information and the cultural exchange side of it. At first we spent much of our time continually putting out fires. I was working with our Air Force officers at Itazuke trying to explain their position to the Japanese as an important operation to protect Japan during the Korean conflict. So we did a lot of work on base relations inviting fighter jet pilots and others at the base to meet with the students often teaching English to them. Our plan was to try and establish these personal relationships between base personnel and the university teachers and students to get more community support for our largest air force facility in southwestern Japan just across from Korea.

Overall, our USIS mission then was to try and achieve a better understanding of our policy positions and Japan's security was one of the major ones. Of course, at that time the "Rhee Line" was also a major problem in our area, and elsewhere in Japan, because they felt it affected their fishing rights. We also had the "Bikini ashes" incident, which you remember well, following our nuclear test in the Bikini region when atomic fall out resulted in the death of a fisherman. The anti-US feeling at the time was very strong, and once again we had to defend our position.

Q: The Lucky Dragon was the name of the boat.

FORSTER: Right. The Lucky Dragon. Then you had the case of the US soldier firing on a Japanese entering one of our target ranges in northern Japan. It was known as the "Gerard Case", as I recall, and once again there was a lot of hard feeling since the Japanese felt our military court had let him off too lightly.

Q: I think he was picking up shell casings.

FORSTER: That was it. There was one public opinion issue after another in those early days, and it was our job to deal with them to keep US-Japan relations on course.

Nagasaki was also in my region of responsibility, where the atom bomb hostility was still running quite high at the time, although it was not as strong there as it was in Hiroshima. I've often thought about Nagasaki bombing as contrasted to Hiroshima, and I think the long association with the West and the strong Christian community there-mostly Catholic-made the big difference. Feeling was not as intense there as up in Hiroshima, where my colleague, Fazl Fotouhi, was running into more severe psychological problems.

Long Term Contribution of Exchange of Persons Program

Beyond the shorter term policy issues I would say that it was the cultural exchange effort, the Fulbright program, which really paid off as time went on. The International Visitor program was another very positive longer-range effort, since we were able to get many younger Japanese journalists writers, government officials (city and prefectural), to go to the States. When they returned, you could see the changes. Many of them had not been there before. We had a socialist leader, for example, Masao Takahashi, and there were a lot of questions about why we were sending him. I even had to do a special waiver on him. Well, he was the fellow who took on extreme leftists when he returned from the States and challenged them effectively resulting eventually in more moderate socialist positions.

USIS Role in Moving Japanese Labor From Radical Left

Q: The party broke apart.

FORSTER: Right. He's still JSP, Japan Socialist Party, but he was among those early socialists himself, an extreme socialist, who could see that just going along with the Soviet line was not the answer for Japan.

Then, of course, you had the whole labor situation with the more leftist Sohyo unions, and you were working to try and alleviate some of that by bringing in our own labor leaders to meet with them, to see if they couldn't become more moderate. You will remember in the beginning how active the Nikkyoso, the Japan Teachers Union, and the Zengakuren student unions were and the coal depression was very serious in Kyushu. So there was plenty of ammunition for the far left in Japan, and they were using it effectively, very effectively.

Q: All the way from radical socialism to actual communism.

FORSTER: I'm sure this story has been told, but I think USIS did play a fantastic role working with the more moderate elements in the labor movement through the years.

Q: Talk more about that. I think that's the case.

FORSTER: Oh, there's no question. We could see it in Kyushu, how extreme it was. I could see it later in the Kansai. But I would say that the terrific selection of labor grantees by USIS officers in Tokyo and in the field, and the creation of the USIS labor officer position in Tokyo, were instrumental in bringing this about, because over almost a 30-year period you selected those leaders who were concerned—they were not necessarily pro-US, but they were concerned about the way the extreme left was taking over these unions. They were far more interested in their kind of socialist labor movement which was closer to the Scandinavian or the British model. I remember we worked with Professor Yoshihiko Seki when I was up in Tokyo later, who had been to Oxford and who had written the most comprehensive Japanese book on Socialism and the labor movement in Britain. We made it possible for specialists like him to have access to their colleagues not only in the United States through our special grants but also in Europe through the Asia Foundation grants.

So you could see over the years this remarkable swing to a more moderate position away from ideological policies. Granted, we were not the factor, but I would say we were a darned important factor in this whole process. It was the Japanese themselves who were concerned in the first place. But through our programs, bringing American labor scholars like Saul Levin to Japan, we were able to exert considerable influence, and he and others traveled all over Kyushu and other regions to meet with labor leaders.

Charlie Medd, who died recently, was a fine example, I think, of a USIS officer who got out around the country and taught himself Japanese. He was a center director at first in Nagasaki. Charlie studied the Japanese union movement and reached out to the labor unions, really got to know them backwards and forwards. He later became the labor officer in Tokyo where his knowledge of Japanese, and his ability to relate to these labor leaders at all levels make him one of our more effective communicators.

Lew, we've just had a break here, and I'm not sure whether I mentioned John McDonald as another outstanding USIS officer who, along with Charlie Medd, did so much to make that labor program a success. I would like to mention John, as well.

Q: There's no doubt that the labor work was great. We had two labor information officers in Tokyo while I was there. The first one was a fellow by the name of Tom Colosimo. He was succeeded by Jim...

FORSTER: Walsh, wasn't it?

Q: I think that was it. Both of them got very close to the Sohyo people and Sodomei, the seamen's union, particularly, and were doing a splendid job. Colosimo did it first, and then Jim. I left about that time, right in the middle of Jim's period as labor officer, so I never knew how completely successful he was in the last analysis, but I understand he did a fine job, too.

FORSTER: Oh, yes. They were all extremely successful. I was in on field trips with Jim and I remember that Colosimo would also come out from Tokyo. Charlie, of course, was in my area, and John McDonald was one of my center directors. Both started out as field officers and then went to Tokyo. All of these labor officers were very special and a real credit to the Foreign Service in my view.

Q: Labor unions are still fractious in Japan, but I don't think they are any longer left wing-dominated.

FORSTER: Correct. It's a whole new ball game.

Q: Then from Fukuoka, what was your next assignment?

FORSTER: You had left Japan, I guess, by that time.

Q: I had left by then.

1956: Transferred To Kobe As Regional PAO For Kansai Area; Long Range Aftermath Of Nagano Seminar

FORSTER: I was assigned in '56 after three years in Fukuoka, to the Kobe-Osaka district as regional public affairs officer for that region. Walter Nichols was our field supervisor by that time. I spent two years there. During that time I should like to highlight two things which come to mind. There were many more, but these two in particular-working on the development of the Kyoto American Studies Program and the highly successful Faulkner visit to Japan remain memorable and had great impact on the Japanese educators.

Q: I understand that the Kyoto studies program was a direct descendant of the Nagano seminar with Faulkner and was more or less a broader, more political program.

FORSTER: Oh, it was definitely spurred by it. Again, you have to recall-as I'm sure you do-the situation there in the '50s, when many of the younger Japanese literature professors were really not given an opportunity at their universities to get into American studies and were told to avoid the young "upstarts," as their mentors would call them, authors like Hemingway and Faulkner. This was not really English literature! I remember in particular the Dean of Literature at the University of Kyushu, who had studied in England before the war. His whole program was built around Chaucer. It was pretty deadly for many of his younger professors who were far more interested in contemporary American authors.

So we used to have these meetings at the American Center with the younger Japanese professors bringing in our own specialists on many of our great authors, and these Japanese became the nucleus of a whole new generation in Kyushu of American literature specialists. This happened throughout Japan at the time, a real ground swell, and, like the labor program, USIS played a very important role in introducing American studies and, thereby, American culture and our values, so that the Japanese would know more about us.

As you say, the visit of Faulkner brought that all together, because those professors who were coming to our center to escape this Chaucerian type, all went to that Nagano seminar, and many of their students also went to the seminar. I was in Kyushu at the time of the Faulkner seminar. That just reinforced the determination of the younger Japanese scholars to get a strong American studies program under way at Kyushu University, which is kind of an old line traditional university. That happened, as you know only too well, all around Japan at the time, and once again, I believe, USIS was the catalyst and we all had a lot to do with it.

The other thing I might mention is during the Kansai period (late '50s) the Japanese really discovered modern American drama and modern dance for the first time. Up until the time of the New York City Ballet-when we started bringing in our big performing artists, it was generally the Europeans and the Russians who were receiving top billing in Japan. The only ballet that had any impact in Japan was the Bolshoi. So when the New York City Ballet came out for the first time to the first Osaka Cultural festival, it really was overwhelming for the Japanese. They were so impressed. Of course, after that, the NYC Ballet and other groups started coming over regularly.

Q: This was the festival in '58?

FORSTER: In '58. Right. The USSR-sponsored Bolshoi was there along with the US-sponsored New York City Ballet and it was our ballet which received the rave reviews. The same thing happened later with the first musicals we were able to bring out like "Hello, Dolly" with Mary Martin. This started a whole new wave and a new interest in American drama and music. You may recall that we also started programming the first symphonies, the L.A. Symphony, the Symphony of the Air and other musical attractions at this time which were widely acclaimed.

Q: The first one to come was the Symphony of the Air.

FORSTER: I believe so.

Q: Their contract with, I think, NBC had just been terminated, and they didn't know what they were going to do. They were still intact, so they were sent out by the State Department as a big cultural presentation and were a tremendous success.

FORSTER: Oh, yes. The USIS centers arranged for that complete tour all around Japan. So again, I would like to cite that as an example of our ability to put the American performing arts on the center stage in Japan. Now, of course, we don't need to do that any longer. The Japanese bring them over continually.

1956 to '58 was a very interesting time, indeed, and this is when we started working with younger professors of international relations and studies at Kyoto University and Doshisha, who were concerned about the Marxist domination of the curriculum, particularly at Kyoto University. We were able, as with the labor leaders, to arrange for them to go to the States, not only to meet their counterparts, but also to gather materials to bring back. When they returned they were able to attract more students because they were not as ideological as the Marxist types. They really wanted to have a more objective presentation of world history for their students and the American experience provided by USIS was a great help to them.

One of the leaders of that movement was Professor Masamichi Inoki, who you may remember. His disciples or "deshi" as they call them in Japan, were also able to visit our universities to develop the same kind of network of contacts and this resulted in a whole new approach to the study of world politics in Japan. That, I think, was very significant, and it not only happened in the area I was in, but also in Tokyo and the other USIS center areas in Japan.

Q: It's too bad that too often our program has been judged on what has been an immediate reaction to the political situation. We tear ourselves apart-or did-in getting a lot of material out, motion pictures and pamphlets, that sort of thing, trying to get immediate impact. I don't say that these haven't been successful on occasion, because many of them have been, but the long-range impact is so hard to identify as an accomplishment at the time it's going on, that you have to wait three, four, six, seven years before you realize it's full impact.

FORSTER: Exactly.

Q: We have often been unable to sell our case in Congress simply because you can't measure this thing in terms of one or two years.

FORSTER: Precisely. And there is continuity to it. I think that was very important. Like working with Professor Inoki and his graduate students and with other professors like that, who wanted to have greater objectivity in their treatment of current affairs in the books they wrote and the classes they taught. Some became commentators, many of them, and they wrote articles for influential magazines. We also concentrated on journalists sending them over a period of years and many returned with a positive impression as a result of their trip and came back with broader international perspectives.

On my last tour in Japan (1977-81) under Ambassador Mansfield, I found I was working with senior editors and professors, whom we had known in Japan way back when they were at the bottom of the rung, young profs, associate professors, or, indeed, assistant city editors or assistant political reporters. Now they were in top positions in Japan. All of those people, so many of them, had their first contact with the United States through the USIS State Department International Visitor Programs or Fulbright or through the USIS Centers. That, to me, is what USIA was all about, and I hope that these longer-range efforts are continuing.

Q: Where did you go after you left Japan?

1958: Information Officer In Rangoon, Burma

FORSTER: In 1958, I joined Ambassador Arthur Hummel when he was public affairs officer in Rangoon, Burma. Arthur kindly invited me to come down and join him and I was eager to do so having first served under him in Japan. I was most interested in this assignment, having been in the Philippines but never in mainland South-east Asia. So I went down as his information officer from Kobe 1958.

Let me just say that this assignment came at a most interesting time historically. It was the period from 1958 when Ne Win staged his first coup-an "arranged coup" with U Nu, who was then the prime minister. It was felt that U Nu had been too tolerant of the communists and that there had to be a greater effort to keep them out of Rangoon and to turn this thing around. So when we arrived the first coup had taken place and General Ne Win was in control. We left Burma two years later just before the second coup in 1961, when there was a real takeover by Ne Win. This time it was not "arranged" as Ne Win wanted absolute control.

Q: Hadn't he turned the government back to the civilians for a short time?

Ne Win's "Second Coming" And Resultant Descend Into Repressive, Leftist Dictatorial Rule

FORSTER: That's right. That's the period we were there. Not only that, he welcomed-or this is the way it started out-all of us in there. USIA was in Rangoon with the British Council as were the PRC and the USSR, all our opposite numbers. You had the Japanese working on construction projects, as we were with our AID programs. You had the Israelis helping them up in the more arid areas, near Mandalay. It was a real international effort to try and help Burma develop and bring it out into the open. It reminded me somewhat of the period in Japan after Deshima when the country began to open up to foreign influence.

But the real problem as time went on-and I'm not sure that we yet know all the causes of it-was that Ne Win became more and more opposed to this foreign presence. It suddenly became a case of "a plague on all your houses" and we were all given our walking papers. While we still had some representation there our personnel was cut way back and the library was closed. It took a long time for USIS to get under way again. The Fulbright program meanwhile was also closed down.

We were there, however, during the years when you could travel all over Burma and when you could accomplish a great deal, before the curtain came down. It was, as I say, a very exciting time, because you were getting back into what we had in the Philippines earlier with our "nation-building" type of program, assisting the Burmese with their efforts in the fields of education, public health and government administration. The Asia Foundation was also there with its projects. There were so many of us who were in there trying to do our very best to help this government that had been so rocky since the war what with insurrection movements and a deteriorating economy.

Ne Win, at least at the beginning, was pushing for a more unified Burma. I was not there for the actual coup and Ne Win's sudden moves against foreigners, but I understand from Rob Nevitt and others who were there, that it was just unbelievable how Ne Win turned against us and suddenly you had more of a socialist-communist type regime which was very dictatorial. The newspaper editors we had worked with were thrown into jail. One of them-maybe you knew him-was Ed Law Yone, the influential editor of the Nation, who was later with U Nu in Bangkok in exile.

Q: I met him just once.

FORSTER: His paper was closed down and he was put into solitary confinement. From '61 that country has been virtually walled off. It was very depressing because USIS was right out in front and very active in promoting closer relations at all levels.

Defection Of Soviet Information Officer

I might just mention one event that was rather interesting. My opposite number in the Soviet Embassy was Kaznachayev. I don't know whether you recall this, but Kaznachayev was the information officer with their embassy. Just before he defected to us the military attaché, Colonel Stragin had also attempted to defect, but his own Soviet staff caught up with him and dragged him back, shipped him back to the Soviet Embassy. He was shipped out on a PRC plane. That infuriated the Burmese, because they knew Stragin was seeking asylum and protection from them, and they did not like the way he was whisked out of the country.

So Kaznachayev played his cards well. He walked quietly into our USIS library to defect. Zelma Graham, who was the director, called over to the embassy. He was a young fellow, very fluent in English. He said he was not a communist, and had not joined the party. He had come out to Burma to work on a Burmese-Russian dictionary, and said he was conscripted by his embassy. While there, he became increasingly upset about the KGB and what they were up to in Burma. The Soviets, of course, learned that he was in our embassy, and they were about to put out a story that we had kidnapped him. When we got wind of this, Art Hummel called the press officer, Larry Sharpe, and myself to counter that effort. We were able to get around to all the media to invite them in to meet with Kaznachayev at USIS the following morning to tell his story. He blew things wide open. His story appeared all over Asia and was also carried by the wire services to the US and Europe. It opened all eyes to what the Soviets were up to in attempting to subvert a neutral country like Burma and USIS played an important role in getting the story out.

We had been hoping, actually, to return to Burma for a second tour, but by that time I was running into this congressional regulation, apparently, where after eleven years out-

1960: Regulations Require Stateside Assignment; Assigned To USUN On Public Affairs Staff;
Soon The Bay Of Pigs

Q: You are required to return for a Washington assignment after a specified number of consecutive years abroad.

FORSTER: That's right. So I was pulled back into Washington (1961) and assigned first to the United Nations. John Kennedy had just become President and I was assigned to the 15th General Assembly on the U. S. Delegation. Adlai Stevenson had just come in as Ambassador to head up our delegation and I had the great privilege and honor of serving on his public affairs staff. It turned out to be a rewarding but tough assignment.

That was the session, the second session of the General Assembly, where all hell broke loose with the Bay of Pigs, and where we simply did not have all the background up in New York. As a result, we were being clobbered by the other delegates with no detailed information to counter. It was kind of a low period for us since the whole operation had not been handled well. I could see then that when a policy goes awry, as that one did, how it can undermine your credibility overnight. Because up until the Bay of Pigs, Lew, at that General Assembly, we had considerable support, largely as the result of Adlai Stevenson's presence. He was widely admired by the other delegates. While he came through fine in the end, the Bay of Pigs cast a dark shadow over the credibility of the entire US delegation. "You folks must have known," was the usual comment received. I had the job of going around just prior to that on the disarmament question and on other issues, trying to explain our positions and other delegates listened with interest. It was working out pretty well until the Bay of Pigs hit us and our credibility dropped, at least for awhile.

One of our major assignments at the United Nations was to set up the Foreign Press Center and we managed to complete that task during the General Assembly.

Later in 1961, Desk Office, USIA Washington For Japan And Korea

I was assigned in June to the Japan-Korea Desk with USIS just about the time Professor Reischauer was going out as our ambassador to Japan, and Charles Fahs was being assigned as public affairs officer. I was in that assignment from 1961, right up through the assassination [of President John F. Kennedy] in 1963. I recall that we were both in Washington at that tragic time.

Q: Yes, I was in Washington at that time.

FORSTER: I felt I was very fortunate coming in on my first Washington assignment during those years. Those were great years, I thought, for USIA. I know how close you were to the late Ed Murrow, and I always had had a great admiration for him. Then suddenly to have him as our director of USIA, I was just thrilled about this. There was an excitement about work at the Agency then, a real sense of purpose, with President Kennedy and Mr. Murrow's strong interest in Japan and the assignment of the Japan specialist, Edwin Reischauer, as ambassador to Japan, and a PAO like Fahs who knew Japan. There was to be a whole new relationship, which certainly pleased the Japanese following the tense period of the Security Treaty riots. I must say I take great pride in having been in on the beginning with Ken Bunce, who was our area director, as you know. He certainly knew Japan well, and you were there running the administrative side of the Agency with your long Japan experience. So we just had, I felt, a ready-made situation for improving our relations in spades.

Q: I think we did. I think probably Ed Murrow's incumbency, as the director was the highlight of the USIA Agency.

FORSTER: I certainly think so.

Q: At the moment I'm about halfway through reading Joe Persico's book. Have you yet read that?

FORSTER: I want to get hold of it. I read some very good reviews.

Q: I also read the first book on Murrow by [A.M.] Sperber, which is not as bad a book as some people say. But Persico's is a much better one.

FORSTER: Was Persico a former USIS officer?

Q: Persico was, yes. Sperber, the woman who wrote the first book, obviously didn't have the insight into Murrow and his personality, and she didn't have access to nearly as many people who knew Ed intimately. She spent ten years researching it, but she didn't deal with many of the people whom Persico got to. The difference is between night and day. The Persico book is so much better than this Sperber book. You really feel that you know Murrow when you get through with that book. I can't say more. It's an excellent book. It didn't get the publicity nor the acceptance of the Sperber book, because the Sperber one beat Persico's by two and a half years. But it's a tremendous book and it ought to be read by anyone who wants to know anything about Murrow.

FORSTER: I certainly want to get hold of it, because I've heard such fine things about it.

They were, indeed, great years. Of course, it ended so abruptly there for all of us with the assassination. I might mention one story about USIA during those last days with President Kennedy. We were hosting the US-Japan Cultural Conference in Washington just a few weeks before the assassination. It was in October, I believe, and Mr. Murrow was to have been one of the American delegates to that conference when he had to go in for surgery for the cancer ailment. He was so interested in the conference because Mr. Maeda, President of NHK, was to have been his Japanese counterpart and they were scheduled to discuss the subject of educational TV exchange.

I was summoned one morning by Don Wilson, the Deputy USIA Director, and informed that Murrow wanted me to go up to see Frank Stanton, President of CBS, to invite him on his behalf to take over as his substitute. Of course, Stanton, because of his admiration for and long association with Murrow, consented right away. That cultural conference turned out to be a very productive one and led to the establishment of a very active TV exchange program between NHK and our public television stations. It was a real breakthrough and Murrow pulled it off with the help of Frank Stanton. The direct result was the improvement of American TV programs viewed by Japanese audiences and an introduction to American audiences of Japanese educational films.

Q: What year was that?

FORSTER: That was October, 1963, just before the assassination in November of '63.

Q: We lost the president from the nation, and we lost Murrow from USIA.

Impact Of Kennedy's Pre-Recorded Televised Message To Japan As First US Satellite Beamed To Japan Passed Over That Country Aired Just After Assassination

FORSTER: It was a double blow, which I shall certainly never forget. One other event at the time involved the White House and since it was rather historical and so little is known about it, I should like to mention it here. We were told by NASA that they were going to be putting up this relay satellite-I think it was Relay 2-that would be going in the direction of Japan on a westerly course. The plan was to launch it from the Mojave Desert. We suddenly had the idea that it would be great if we could get President Kennedy to address the people of Japan as the satellite moved over Japan for the first time, and then to have a special program, arranged by USIS with three national networks, to follow in behind the President's message. The White House bought the idea right away.

I remember the President was in New York giving a speech at the Waldorf Astoria and Don Wilson told me to call Pierre Salinger to give it the go-ahead. We immediately prepared the message for the president, which we delivered to him the following week at the White House. Actually, he had prepared his own very personal message and really didn't need our draft. It was a beautiful message to the people of Japan written in a warm, informal style.

What happened subsequently was that the relay satellite went up within minutes as I recall after the president had been shot. There were then some anxious moments with someone at COMSAT who was involved with the satellite launch that day. Whoever it was, there was this bureaucratic response of, "Well, we're not going to be able to use that footage because the president has just been shot." I was infuriated about this and went charging in to see Ken Bunce and I said, "Look, Ken, they can't do this. This is the president's message to the Japanese people when he was still very much alive. He's still alive according to news reports. We can't assume that this is the end until there is confirmation." Ken was in touch right away with Don Wilson and in very short order we were able to get it back on the relay to Japan.

Q: Who read the speech?

FORSTER: The president did. The president had prepared the speech prior to the launching of the relay.

Q: Did Johnson read the speech that Kennedy had written?

FORSTER: No, no, because Kennedy had been on camera at the White House the previous week and it was ready to go before the assassination. Then whether it was NASA or COMSAT, I don't exactly remember, but the response was "We're not going to be able to use that. The president has just been shot." We argued very strongly that it should be used, and it was used.

The impact of that speech, followed by the NHK use of live coverage on the relay satellite of the assassination and that terrible weekend in Washington, was very great in Japan and reached viewers just as they were getting up that morning. When the relay satellite first came over, the Japanese were getting the president live and listening to his message to them. By the time the relay was around again, they were getting the reports of his death. The NHK correspondent in Washington called us early in the morning to see if it would be possible to use the satellite just to send all the weekend coverage. To this day when you talk to our Japanese friends like Sen Nishiyama and others, they describe the tremendous impact of that event which has never been forgotten by those who viewed it at the time.

Q: I think we might say for the record here that Sen Nishiyama, although he started out his career with USIS and worked there for years, subsequently became the special assistant to the president and founder of Sony, and became almost a worldwide figure. Also, he was the one who was so prominent in Japan because he had been an American-born Nisei and he had been an electrical engineering graduate from University of Utah. When the walk on the moon took place, NHK got him on the TV, and for that whole week of the moon walk, he handled the transmission, the announcing and analysis of that whole program. In the process he became a national figure in Japan. He's not just some person who is an unknown individual.

FORSTER: Yes. I'm glad you entered that background on Sen, because he has been so important to the USIS efforts through the years. Not only USIS, but to the whole US-Japan relationship.

1964: Reassigned To Japan As Field Program Supervisor

It was shortly after the assassination, in early 1964, that I was reassigned to Japan. Reischauer was still the ambassador. Charles Fahs was the PAO. Walter Nichols was the cultural affairs officer. Charles Fahs' deputy was Ed Nickel, and I was assigned as field supervisor for the USIS centers throughout Japan. Having come up through the centers, I guess they felt maybe I could make some kind of contribution. Again, as a continuation of that whole period, the Kennedy period, there was the legacy of that, the relationship with Japan, and I returned at a time when the relationship was very good. It was a marvelous time to go back in and to work not only in cultural exchange, but on the information side, as well.

So I did spend the next few years in Japan, first as field supervisor and then subsequently as deputy to Ed Nickel when he became PAO. Ed was transferred to the JUSPAO operation after the Tet Offensive in Vietnam and Ned Roberts came in as PAO. I was with Ned as his deputy for the next several months before being reassigned to Washington to enter the Senior Seminar Program of the State Department from 1970 to 1971.

Those years in Japan were never dull in terms of US-Japan relations, and we returned to Tokyo just at the time of the Olympics. The Japanese were becoming more international in their approach. You could see how the Olympics changed the Japanese almost overnight. So many of them were so anxious to have the world come to Japan, to Tokyo. They took great pride in this. As you know, they put in new subway systems, the monorail, the fast-speed Shinkansen trains and countless new hotels which we thought would never fill up. Of course, they're all filled today, one hotel after another. Tokyo was a mess! (Laughter) I'm sure you remember it. It was being torn up and rebuilt for the Olympics, and we thought to ourselves, "How will the Olympics ever start on time? This city is such a mess." But by golly, that opening day, everything was set to go. I've always been impressed by how they got it all together in time.

Q: I didn't see Tokyo at that time, because from the time I left in the spring of 1956, until I came back on a visit in 1967, I had never been in Japan again. I was gone for eleven years. I came back after the Olympics, and I think it was the Olympics that really brought Japan into the modern world.

FORSTER: It really did. We left six years later-we were there for two three-year tours-from the time of the Olympics to the World Expo in Osaka in 1970. By that time, things had really changed. Talking about Japan into the modern world, the Olympics in 1964 were the Olympics that they were planning to host before the war to follow the Olympics in Germany in 1936, weren't they?

Q: Yes, they were supposed to have had the Olympics in 1940. Incidentally, I landed in Japan with the Japan-America Student Conference on July 14, 1938, the day that Japan announced they were withdrawing as the host of the 1940 Olympic games.

FORSTER: Interesting.

Q: All the press swarmed aboard the ship as we came into Yokohama Harbor. The first question that was asked to me by a correspondent, who happened to be Brad Coolidge, by the way, working for the Japan Advertiser, "What have you got to say about Japan's cancellation of the Olympics?" We hadn't even heard about it. We'd been on the ship for thirteen days. I remember what excitement that caused when they announced they would not handle the Olympics in '40.

FORSTER: So finally they were getting them back in 1964. Then, of course, the Expo in 1970 and to be there at the time of the Expo in Osaka was just amazing. You were having so many of the folks from the prefectures-farmers, housewives, students-all coming in and carrying these little passports to go from one foreign pavilion to another. Now today, of course, they're all over, aren't they? But that was bringing the world to Japan in 1970. Then things really started opening up. I'd say the Olympics in Tokyo and the Expo in Osaka, the impact of those two events was very great. Japan was now going the international route in a big way, for the first time since Meiji, wouldn't you say?

Q: Yes.

FORSTER: So I think whenever you stop to reflect about this, Japan has not been all that international until just these recent year.

Q: And they still have a long way to go. They really haven't fully, I think, understood what role they have to play in the modern world.

FORSTER: That's very true. And there again is where USIA, I believe, has been trying to assist in shaping that role through international exchanges and communication, but it's been tough going at times.

Q: It's a tough row now, because the Japanese are so bitter against the United States. We haven't handled it very well. Mutual recrimination is very-

FORSTER: Does not help. No. The bashing that we now have-and I'll get into that, I guess, when I get back to the period with Ambassador Mansfield, because he was trying to handle that and doing it so well, but the odds were very great against him at that point.

1970: Back To Washington-State Department's Senior Seminar

Q: So where did you go after that?

FORSTER: The Senior Seminar, which was a great year (1970-71). It was a year of rediscovery of the United States and the issues and problems we were facing both domestically and globally. Of course, our group was there during the time of the student discontent and Vietnam and we went around to the different universities. It was a learning experience for all of us who were brought in to participate in that unusual program. Most of the group were State and there were some military. Dick Cushing, Horace Dawson and I were the only USIA officers.

In 1971, I was assigned as public affairs officer to Tel Aviv and I spent the next two years there.

1971: Public Affairs Officer, Tel Aviv, Israel

Q: What do you have to say about the program in Israel? Of course, that was the period before Israel became quite so belligerent worldwide.

FORSTER: Their settlements on the West Bank certainly had a negative impact on world public opinion.

Q: What was the thrust of your program for Israel in those years?

FORSTER: When we were there, Golda Meir was running the show and doing a very effective job of it with leaders like Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres. Israel was not having the problems that it's having today. Cairo was under blackout then and Sadat was coming out with a strong anti-Israeli line at that time. You certainly had the feeling that Israel was surrounded by hostile regimes, and that they needed some kind of support.

I'd say at that time we were generally more sympathetic to their problems. We-when I say "we," I am referring to those of us in USIS, who were on the cutting edge of this because we would continually be up against a very active and vocal Israeli media, who felt that the US did not fully understand the position they were in. This is when we were pressing them very hard on the "Rogers Plan" to try and work out some kind of adjustment in the Sinai and to avoid retaliatory raids in depth into Egypt and Lebanon. We felt this would be counterproductive. Of course, they continued with those for a while. Lebanon was not the major problem then; it was Egypt.

Violent Anti-Israel Terrorism

Then along about 1972, we could feel the Arab-Israeli tension building up fast. We were very close to some of this, both in Jerusalem and in northern Israel. You had terrorist strikes across the border from Lebanon, a family killed after a Bar Mitzvah not too far from where we were traveling on the road, which caused great resentment in Israel. Then came the "Munich massacre" as they called it when several of their best team members were killed by PLO terrorists at the Olympics. That had a devastating effect on the Israelis and found them striking back in force. Then there was the capture of the Sabena plane with Israelis aboard by the Palestinians right on the Lod airport tarmac outside Tel Aviv. Dayan personally led the commandos who rescued the passengers. Now, they were really beginning to retaliate in force each time, and the policy made sense to them since these terrorist strikes were increasing.

Next came the Lod Airport massacre, which was a surprise attack by three Japanese "Red Army" or Sekigun terrorists who had been trained in Lebanon. They just opened fire indiscriminately on the passengers after the landing while waiting for baggage in the terminal. The airport was like a battlefield with dead and dying, women and children, everywhere. Those of us involved at the time will never forget the carnage.

Q: Just as the other tape ended, you said the airfield was just like a battlefield.

FORSTER: And many of those victims were Puerto Ricans coming on a pilgrimage to visit the Holy Land, American citizens, many of them. Those of us in the embassy went out as pallbearers the following day. The Japanese ambassador and his wife, who were visibly moved by this "massacre" involving Japanese went from one hospital to another to visit the victims. Being Japanese, they took personal responsibility and went on television to apologize to the Israeli people. Of course, many of the Israelis couldn't understand why they should take it so personally since they were in no way responsible. The Japanese sent a delegation immediately from Tokyo to take care of all the claims and this was also immensely impressive to the Israelis.

But you could see and feel the Israelis steeling up. At that point, they were mad and this is when they started striking back, as you recall, with their own agents in various parts of Europe, and they would throw it back at us in our sessions. "You see? You see this? How do you deal with this? You have to strike, strike, strike." It was clearly an "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

And Israeli Counter Strikes

Then came the raids into Lebanon. Nancy and I were skiing on Mt. Hermon, I remember, at the time of one of the first raids. Their jets just came screaming right across Mt. Hermon to attack the southern Lebanon area. The tension simply increased and it got worse with the passage of time.

Q: This was in '72, wasn't it?

FORSTER: The winter of 1972.

Q: Before the '73 War.

FORSTER: That's right. We left Israel just before the outbreak of that conflict. We were coming back for a second tour, and were on leave at the time of the "Yom Kippur" conflict as it became known. We went to their twenty-fifth anniversary celebrating the creation of the State of Israel. It was their big anniversary celebration in Jerusalem in the spring of 1973 and the Israelis were riding high. You could just see that they were feeling very good about things, in general, and were convinced that their forces were adequate to cope with any invasion threat. So it was a great shock to them when the Arabs struck on Yom Kippur Day and moved in so rapidly over the Sinai and across the Golan Heights.

I would just like to say one or two things about this period of service in Israel. Because of the kind of tensions building up between us, we were cautioning them to avoid over-kill pointing out that our retaliation raids in Vietnam were often counter-productive. We urged them to work out some kind of solution with the Palestinians, the Peace for Land thing. But the Israelis were not prepared to buy this.

I even arranged for a number of leading Israeli journalists to go as a team around the US to get some idea of the feeling that was building up in the US even then about some of the Israeli intransigence. I don't know whether it resulted in much, because they felt they were beleaguered and that we had no conception of the real problem-survival. But at least they had a chance to have face-to-face talks with editors outside of Washington. So many of them were tied in with the Washington scene. They had not gone around the country to get a better idea of American public opinion and it was both educational and disturbing for them.

At that time also I felt that my USIA colleagues in the Arab countries and, indeed, myself, should have more of an opportunity to understand the points of view of our different constituencies.

For example, I had never been to Israel before this assignment and I couldn't quite figure out why they were assigning me there after all these years in Asia. Perhaps they thought this would make me more neutral. After five or six months of discussions in Israel, I felt I needed another perspective. The Israelis are great people, but you can go on all night arguing your points of view, and it gets very intense after a while. You find yourself sort of steaming up.

I was so exposed to their perceptions, I felt, "Boy, I've got to get out of here for a while and find out how the Jordanians, Egyptians and Lebanese feel about this situation and how the PAOs in these neighboring countries are reacting".

So I was able to work out an arrangement with Mike Pistor and Bill Payeff, who had the Middle East area, to go around to the other posts. I just asked my colleagues to please arrange for me to meet with-in the case of Beirut, Palestinians, Christians, all the various elements who are at each other's throats now, and then the same in Egypt and in Jordan. I just wanted to know how they all viewed the Israelis and our policies there and in the Middle East in general. You read about their reactions but I wanted to know face to face. I felt this would be an opportunity also for me to try and give them some idea of our positions on Israel and the Arab world as viewed from Tel Aviv.

This exchange of views turned out rather well and I began to arrange for visits by my PAO colleagues to Israel to meet with Israelis in different fields. Dick Underland, from Amman was one of the first to come over. Ed Penny from Cairo followed with others. I would arrange to get Israeli journalists, scholars, a good mix together with our PAOs, so they could get some idea of their perceptions at first hand.

This was a gamble. I certainly felt it was worth trying and it got off to a good start. Whether you're in Israel or in one of the Arab countries, you sometimes find yourself taking on the coloration if you are not careful. It's the old problem, rather like China when it went under, all the strong feeling over what happened there in '49.

We had a series of good meetings. The whole idea was ultimately to arrange very selectively for Israelis, Palestinians, Jordanians, and Egyptians to meet informally at USIS arranged programs. This was about the time of 1973 just before the Yom Kippur conflict. Then, of course, everything ended with the war and the whole effort went under.

What has happened since then, I think has been a disaster. I was appalled by the changes in Israel with the settlements in the West Bank and the rigidity of Israel's new leadership after Golda. I felt it was going to boomerang on them, and I think it has.

Q: The whole Begin period started with that settlement policy.

FORSTER: And it was just so entirely different from the earlier

Golda Meir period.

I mean, sure, you did have some hostility, but they were very correct then, Lew, about the West Bank. You had a few incidents, yes, but I remember traveling into the West Bank quite often, and for a while Nancy and I lived in the old city of Jerusalem, the Arab quarter and relations were quite good then. We used to try and get residents, leaders of the Arab quarter, together with our American and Israeli friends, just to see if we couldn't break some of this down. Sometimes it worked; sometimes it didn't. One of the great guys-you read about him now-was Mayor Teddy Kollek's advisor, Meron Benvenisti.

Q: Kollek is the mayor of Jerusalem?

FORSTER: Right. He and Benvenisti have tried to follow a middle road and have a sympathetic understanding of Palestinian concerns in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Another one is Amos Elon who just wrote this interesting article on the Peace Now Movement in Israel which appeared in the New Yorker. I'm amazed how much has been happening there with moderate Israelis who oppose Shamir's policies and Begin before him. The feeling, I think, of so many of us is, "Wow! They're all going along with this tough Shamir line." That is not true. I've met a number of Israeli friends recently who I worked with earlier in Israel who say, "Look. We're not for this, for what's happening. We're very upset about this extreme policy that the government has in Israel now."

So I would say the experience there prior to being pulled into Washington as deputy for the Middle East area, was a traumatic one for me, certainly. There were successes, there were failures. It was, overall, the kind of experience that you never forget because it is so intense and because you do meet so many really outstanding people in that country on both sides of the issue whether you agree or disagree with what they're doing and saying. Most of them, including the media people and many of the scholars, feel the way we do about current Israeli policy. Certainly the opportunity to be there when Golda was running things was a special experience.

Q: You were back in the States either on home leave or perhaps going back or not, when the 1973 conflict erupted?

1973: Forster's Return To Israel For Second Tour Canceled; Becomes Deputy Director For Middle Eastern Affairs

FORSTER: Right. We had just left that summer. We had the kids and were en route to Washington, to report in and then go on home leave. I had a call from Bill Payeff from Washington, my old buddy in East Asia, while we were in Paris. He said, "Cliff, we want you to come on in. I'm going to head up the Near East and North Africa Division and want you as my deputy."

I told Bill, "Look, I haven't figured this area out in two years. It's going to take me another two, at least." Regardless of all the problems, we were all enjoying our time there just from the standpoint of the history and archeology of the area. There's just so much, not to mention the tremendous psychological challenge for us from the policy standpoint, too. So I was eager to return to Israel but they wanted me in, and they assigned Stan Moss to replace me in Tel Aviv.

So I reported in, and it was just shortly after I arrived-I had to cancel my leave, as I recall-that all hell broke loose with the Yom Kippur war. The kids lost some of their Israeli teachers, who were killed in that conflict, so it had quite an impact on them. We lost some very good Israeli friends. It was clearly an Arab invasion in our view although there was a lot of conjecture about it at the time, but when Syria struck Israel on that day, it was reminiscent of Pearl Harbor. They were all observing Yom Kippur, and the Syrians just came across their borders as did the Egyptians with their tanks to the south.

We immediately set up this Middle East task force. VOA played a terribly important role during that time and we were working with VOA to make sure that US reaction, official and unofficial, was getting through to both sides and particularly to the Arab states since we felt it was important for them to know just where we stood in case there were any major moves with Soviet support. VOA was also an important channel to let the Soviets know where we stood since the Soviets were actively supporting Syria, as you may recall. Kissinger, when he sent in those planes, the cargo flights, to Israel, couldn't get any support at first and they finally had to come through the Azores to refuel en-route. It was a dicey time and USIA's support in getting the message through to the different parties became very important.

So we went through that conflict with the task force, working with our State colleagues. It was a good group. Joe Sisco and Roy Atherton over in State, Bill Payeff, Bill Rugh and others with USIA. I think you had on that task force, as you did on the Vietnam task force later, a very special bond of professional cooperation between the State and USIA officers. There was a lot of respect for the expertise that we could provide, the importance of the Voice in getting the word through, and an acceptance and understanding of what information tools we could use during this crisis to support our policy actions.

Q: On the other hand, the Arabs never forgave us for that intensive supply effort to the Israelis. We probably saved the Israeli nation at that time.

FORSTER: You're absolutely right. The incrimination and the rest of it. But you couldn't just let Israel go under.

Q: And they would have.

FORSTER: Oh, no question. The Israelis say this themselves. The way the Egyptians moved in across the desert until Sharon, who was right of Attila politically (their General Patton), pushed their tanks back into Egypt. A number of those generals that they had were not as extreme as Sharon. Many of them were fine men and they sustained great losses. Dayan was still going strong then although it was not too long after that when he and Golda passed on. It's amazing how there was such a political change in Israel after their departure from the scene.

Q: Labor lost.

FORSTER: Labor lost, and then there was the era of Begin. We never saw Begin around during our time in Israel. He was simply out of sight. As a matter of fact, when Begin moved into power, it was only Stan Moss and some of the USIS people who knew him. The ambassador, in order to get together with Begin, worked this out through Stan, I understand. It was a case of where USIS officers had been in contact with all sides.

1974: Both Payeff (Director) And Forster (Deputy) Moved From Middle East To Run East Asia And Pacific Area

Q: How long did you stay as the deputy?

FORSTER: That lasted a very short time since Bill and I were asked to head up the East Asia area where we had longer experience. That's when the Agency reverted to the old area divisions prior to Frank Shakespeare's time.

Q: They had made South Asia a separate division.

FORSTER: That's right, but in 1974 South Asia was returned to the Near East Area and it was at that point that Bill Payeff and I were moved over to the East Asia Division. Those were the critical years of Watergate and Vietnam and I remember I was on the road a good deal visiting our field posts.

- During Which Period Vietnam Fell

If I was not out there, Bill was, and into Vietnam many times. Then came the fall of Vietnam and the trauma that that caused for all of us. We were well staffed in our area office to be able to be of assistance to State at that time. We had Frank Scotton and Ev Baumgartner who had had long experience in Vietnam. They were our Vietnam specialists. Phil Habib was very strong on both officers and he pulled them in on the Vietnam task force and relied on them a great deal.

Alan Carter was the PAO out in Saigon and I guess I was about the last one to have a conversation with him that night from the task force center in State just before Saigon's fall. He was trying desperately to get USIS people out of the USIS building over to the embassy as a collection point. I'm still not clear today just what all happened, but he was really trying that night. He was a real fighter for his people, I thought, certainly while I was serving on that task force.

Q: What years were these?

FORSTER: That was right after the Middle East area assignment which covered the period from the time I returned from Israel in October, 1973 through the Yom Kippur War up until about June, 1974 when we took over the East Asia area from Ken Crane. Bill became area director and I became his deputy. We had the East Asia office from '74 to '77.

Beijing Opens Up For USIA

It was a very tragic, sad and traumatic period with Vietnam and I recall returning to Washington in a depressed state after my last visit to Saigon. But we also were able to get USIS established in Beijing for the first time during this period and that was primarily George Bush, who was ambassador there and had a very active interest in bringing USIS into Beijing. His predecessor did not although I don't know the whole background on this. But one day I had a call from Gene Kopp who was then USIA Deputy Director. He wanted Ambassador Bush to see us about establishing a post in Beijing. Of course, we'd been pushing this for some time. Bill Payeff and I met with Bush about two or three times, I guess. The Ambassador was just great. He came down to the office and put his feet up, was very informal and relaxed, and made it clear that he wanted to have us in there. We had been fighting hard to get USIS established in Beijing and his strong support came as very good news.

John Thompson, a highly professional Harvard trained China specialist was our USIA representative in Beijing at the time. John is presently the European area policy officer but hopefully we'll get him back in China some day soon. He had been a political officer earlier in Beijing because we did not have USIS, so this was the title he had. But he was doing USIS work whenever he could. When George Bush went in, the gates were opened and John became the first PAO. We also set up our first wireless file to get the news out.

Q: So Bush went in as the US representative before we had formal recognition?

FORSTER: That's right. He was then head of the US Liaison Office in Beijing. There was no opposition from the Chinese to our setting up USIS as I recall. But there was opposition from the former US representative which Bush turned around.

Just a little anecdote here. I introduced Ambassador Bush to Frank Scotton, our China Desk Officer, and he was very impressed by Frank. We had sent Frank out there to do a little sleuthing, to see if we couldn't get our post established in Beijing. Bush and Frank really hit it off later as fellow New Englanders. When Ambassador Bush called on us in Washington he wanted some advice on cycling, what kind of bicycle to get. So I found myself talking about the kind of bicycle that might be a good bet for China. I think I recommended a three-speed Raleigh. Anyhow, he wrote back later thanking me although I think he finally got a Chinese bicycle to take the tough terrain. He was very convivial, very cooperative, and it was a good relationship from the beginning once we got the post established. USIS was back in the PRC capital for the first time since the communist take-over.

Eventually we were able to get the Fulbright program under way again, but that took more time and we had to proceed slowly. There was now some forward movement in China.

1977: Forster Returns To Japan As PAO

In 1977, Mike Mansfield became our ambassador to Japan and I received my assignment to be his public affairs office in Tokyo.

Q: Did you replace Al Carter?

FORSTER: No, I replaced Bill Miller, who came in after Carter. In mid-77 I was asked to come up to USIA Director Jim Keogh's office with Gene Kopp and Bill Payeff to meet our new ambassador to Japan, Mike Mansfield.

I've always been a great admirer of Senator Mansfield and it was a real pleasure to meet him for the first time. I must say the next four years with the ambassador, like the earlier Kennedy period with Ed Murrow, were very special years. He was a marvelous man to work for, and he was always so interested in USIS and our role there. He knew how important we could be to what he was trying to achieve and we worked with him on his whole effort to try and deescalate some of the economic issues and tensions that were just beginning to build up over the trade imbalance.

Most of that period I would say we were involved primarily with our trade relations with Japan and since there was so much rhetoric on both sides we had an important job to do. The Ambassador went to every prefecture relying on USIS officers who accompanied him around on all these trips. He recognized the value of what we were doing there, and when Simul International, a prominent Japanese firm, wanted to publish a collection of his speeches in Japan, we worked with them on that project with the Ambassador's approval. That book is a real seller now, a very popular book.

Q: Was it translated into Japanese?

FORSTER: Yes, into Japanese.

Q: Was it our program that did it?

FORSTER: No, it was Simul and we talked it over with Mr. Muramatsu and Mr. Tamura, the publisher. They had expressed interest in doing something really big on the ambassador and we decided that the speeches would be the main content-all using the wireless file copy. For each speech, Simul had a commentary that went along with it by a well known Japanese. It was extremely well done, and the ambassador was very pleased about that and so were we. Of course, Simul was overjoyed. (Laughter) They were able to get that book all around the country.

Ambassador Mansfield, in my view, played a very important role during that critical time. He used to have an expression, Lew, when he would meet with the press, and his press conferences were always on the record. At the end of each session, he would say, "Well, boys, tap 'er light." Of course, he smokes this pipe, you know. So the first one to come and ask me about this was the New York Times correspondent. "When the Ambassador says 'tap 'er light,' I assume it's his pipe," he commented. "Yes, I guess it is," I replied. I just assumed that myself. But the Times bureau chief said he'd like to know. Shortly after that, at a Japanese press conference, the ambassador said the same thing. "Tap 'er light." Several Japanese journalists came up. "What is tap 'er right?" they asked. (Laughter)

So I went up to the ambassador and had one of the longest conversations I experienced with him. He said, "Well, Cliff, when I was a young fellow, I used to work in the copper mines in eastern Montana. As you pound that stick of dynamite into the shaft walls, you'd holler down the line, 'Tap 'er light. Tap 'er light' and that's what we've got to do here in Japan. We've got to keep these economic issues from becoming political issues by tapping 'er light. We don't want to tap her too strong. Let's see if we can't do it without raising the decibel count." And he really worked at that. We all did, I think, but particularly the ambassador. Bill Sherman was his DCM, whom you know, and we coordinated our public affairs effort on this issue with him.

It was a combined effort to try to keep the dialogue going working with congressional people coming through to try and avoid emotional diatribes. And with the Japanese, to try and make them aware of what they were up against with American public opinions and up on the Hill, if they didn't just open up on the trade side. The problem was really on both sides. You could see it coming.

When I left Japan in 1981 it was beginning to escalate fast. It was a very challenging time for both Americans and Japanese in avoiding emotional clashes. I'll just end on this. There are many things to talk about during that period and just about the time we left, we had that big budget crunch. I guess you and I, over the years, went through these cutbacks and RIFs, as we called them, which involved the closure of several USIS centers. But that 1980-81 budget cut was a very difficult business for all of us and we had to cut back although I did my best to hold on to the remaining centers. You know how strongly I feel about the center program which are on the front line of our program.

Q: How many centers did you have at that time?

FORSTER: At that time we had six. From 23 in our earlier period we were down in 1981 to only six-Sapporo, Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, Kyoto and Fukuoka. I just couldn't see another center going and these were the core centers in my view. So we had the usual wrestling match with Washington which kept asserting that we had to cut some centers to meet the requirements.

Revising The Alan Carter Established INFOMAT System

We finally decided to scale back a certain percentage from each center, although it was like pulling teeth. The Tokyo Center, which had the largest number of staff, had one of the largest cuts, although it was all proportionate to size. But, as you know, you can never win and there were bitter feelings. You can't do it right. I thought maybe this would be accepted. We talked it out with each other, but when it happened, it was rough. At least I left knowing that there were still six centers. Six when I came and six when I left.

During that period I was PAO in Japan, I did put things in motion which the Alan Carter supporters were not too happy about, but I did restore some of the old approaches which were anathema to the...

Q: What did you do with all those computer-like monitors in the libraries that Carter set up over there, the system of eliminating books and putting everything on the INFOMAT monitor.

FORSTER: They are still there and this was all part of Alan's INFOMAT system. I went in there determined to take a very hard look at it, which I did. It was explained to me that with the budget cutbacks through the years, that the centers had to do more targeting, that you couldn't just have students in the way you used to with general service libraries. Books were in the libraries but they were selected thematically in priority areas related to the Country Plan. General users of the libraries were discouraged. I felt that it was pretty extreme and couldn't understand why everything we did had to be so selective ignoring so-called targets of opportunity. You had files on everyone in your audience under the new DRS system. There were some useful aspects of that system, as there were to these modernized center facilities, but I did feel the new system lacked flexibility and the centers to me had a rather cold appearance.

What I did not buy was the concept that programs had to be center-oriented. You were discouraged from having programs outside the center. You couldn't co-sponsor, at least the way we used to. I happen to be a firm believer that you do as much as possible with the Japanese on their turf where your objectives and interests are frequently shared. That was out and I took immediate steps to move out into the Japanese communities again instead of linking all programs to our USIS centers.

Another thing that I felt was wrong was to restrict X number of contacts to a specified officer. You just couldn't do that in my view. The chemistry of the thing was wrong. Certain USIS personnel are going to get along much better with some Japanese than others. It may not be the press officer. It may be someone in the cultural section. But you were explicitly instructed that you would work on 30 or so Japanese in your DRS files and that was it. Anyone you made points with outside that small universe did not count. My view was that contacts should be shared and should not be limited to certain individuals. So I modified the system urging officers to seek out contacts beyond a limited number. It was almost like the period of the "doers and the thinkers" in the late "'50s" where certain USIS officers were to produce the information with no real contact responsibility while other officers would concentrate on the contacts. In much the same way, the Carter system limited contact responsibility primarily to the Center Directors and Press Officers. The rest of the staff "produced" for them.

I opposed this system because I felt strongly that there is such a large and important audience you have to work with in a city like Tokyo and I also felt that contacts should be functional. If you have a publications officer, why does he have to sit in his office and just turn out publications? If he puts out an important magazine like "Trends", he should get out there and meet Japanese publishers and writers. He needs these contacts to put out a good magazine and it is important to know what such leading magazines as "Bungei Shunju" and "Chuo Koron" feel is important and what they are saying about US-Japan relations.

We had to be flexible in order to reach our audiences effectively. They are people after all and not numbers or DRS files. I found, for example, that certain very key people, really influential people - newspaper editors, scholars, authors - were knocked off our invitation lists if they had not been to a Center program X number of times. (Laughter) Some of the die-hard disciples of the earlier INFOMAT system as they called it, were strongly opposed to the changes I made. They thought Forster was the devil-incarnate. But we were not going to do it that way and I told our staff shortly after I arrived that I would retain those aspects of the earlier program which made sense but would not buy anything that would restrict our contacts with present and future opinion leaders in Japan. And in most cases we would have to seek out future leaders on their own territory, not ours.

Center Directors at the time I arrived could only function in their immediate areas. The Sapporo Center Director, for example, was restricted to the Sapporo area and yet he had the larger region of the Tohoku which he was not supposed to work in from an operational sense. The same applied to the Center Director in Fukuoka where the Director was required to focus his major attention while the important secondary cities of Kumamoto, Nagasaki and Kagoshima had little or no attention. This was absolutely for the birds in my view and since there was a new batch of Center Directors, with the exception of one or two from the earlier period who opposed what I was doing, we began to make some fundamental changes. Fortunately, I had a great team of young officers coming aboard who felt the way I did.

Suddenly, we were in contact with Sendai again and with important cities like Niigata, Kanazawa, Sendai, Toyama, Kumamoto and Kita-Kyushu. There was the case of the president of a very influential university in Sendai who wanted to know what had happened to USIS in Japan. He had lost all contact and obviously missed it. When Phil Harley, the Sapporo Center Director, and I went into Sendai in 1978, where there had once been a USIS Center, the president greeted us warmly and pointed with great pride to old issues of the USIS-produced "Amerikana" magazine which were still on his shelf. Do you remember "Amerikana" Lew?

Q: Yes.

FORSTER: He still had all the issues up until the new policy was implemented during Carter's time. They stopped then. The President asked me, "Whatever happened to that magazine?"

"You're not getting it?"

"Not any more," he replied, "but my faculty and I share the old issues."

So I went back to check it out and, sure enough, he had been knocked off the list way back as part of this whole new philosophy of communication. I'm all for new philosophies of communication, as long as they make sense and don't get in the way of what you're trying to achieve. I should also point out that Alan Carter did some good work there. He had a fresh approach and new techniques that made sense in some cases. His program division to schedule speakers around the country was a definite improvement and was systematized so it wouldn't change with the next guy coming in to run the program. I did not touch that part of the program. But I did make a number of these other changes I have mentioned.

Q: What did he do with the books? Did he pretty well eliminate books from the library and put it all on screen?

FORSTER: No, you still have the books in the libraries but greater use was made of microfilm and microfiche for research. A congressional records system for computer use was also installed and is greatly appreciated by many of our Japanese patrons. You can plug into the computer to indicate what you are looking for, and you get it right up on the screen. So it's really a library now for researchers, for folks coming in who are interested in getting the latest information in that subject area. This part of Carter's new system was a definite plus. The remaining books are in very selective fields. It's all thematic. You have your books on economics, political science, international relations, environmental problems. And all centers have pretty much the same materials under this thematic breakdown.

Q: We don't have anything more in American literature?

FORSTER: No, you don't have them-not even the classics-and the centers are no longer used the same way. Patrons are coming in now for a specific purpose and that's what I think Alan was trying to do with his new INFOMAT system. He didn't want people walking in there to browse, to just look at books on a shelf. It had to be for a real purpose.

Q: I understand that a lot of our contacts who used to come in and use the library weren't permitted to come in later if their names were no longer on the list.

FORSTER: The difference earlier was that while we maintained "open" libraries and did not restrict entry we also attempted to do more thematic work with our libraries as well going after specialists in different fields. The earlier libraries were by no means passive operations. Under the INFOMAT system they maintained that since the libraries were small and since you just had X number of word processors, you had to restrict use to these smaller audiences. The whole concept changed. Let me just say it was very difficult for me to adjust to this after that earlier period when centers were so lively and often packed with students. The counter-argument that I would get so often was, "Well, times have changed, Cliff. That program is okay for that earlier period, but not for now." I think this transition of our libraries is for future USIA historians to analyze more objectively since we were so close to it and had our own biases.

Q: I find it in many ways rather hard, because I've always been a champion of our libraries.

FORSTER: So have I.

Q: I think that much of the success we had was because of those libraries. They were such a vital part of what was done.

FORSTER: Yes.

Q: I find it very difficult to think that you've got to limit the number of people who can have access to that material.

FORSTER: Yes. Have you been into the libraries at all recently?

Q: No.

FORSTER: I would be most interested in your reaction. You might visit the Tokyo Center on your next trip. Most of the old staff are gone now, but Kyoto-san, the very able librarian there has been trained in this new system and will be happy to explain it to you. They are completely dedicated to the new library concept and their work.

Q: I'll try to drop in.

FORSTER: I had to try and examine it objectively when I returned to Japan in 1977 and it was difficult for me to do, because I, like you, have always felt that the larger audiences with the libraries-and it doesn't mean that you don't have select groups you're working with-are important. But I used to tell some of the new guard who had come in with this system that we always had selected audiences who were influential but it didn't mean we did away with more general audiences in our libraries and our film operations. We did all these other things, as well. And we often discovered that there were potential leaders in those general audiences who came to our attention in later years. There would have been no way of identifying them earlier. A Japanese editor, for example, told me that he "discovered" America as a young student in our library and it changed his attitudes about America and the American people. It also led him into journalism.

You would often hear, "Oh, yes, but weren't you spread thin in those days?" It depends on how you define "spread thin." We were reaching a large number of people who still, today, years later, have never forgotten what those libraries meant to them. I keep running into this at conferences I have attended both here in Hawaii and overseas since my retirement. Japanese and other Asian conferees have told me about the importance of the libraries to them in earlier years. Some have even expressed the view that the same opportunities may not exist for young students and scholars today because of the way the libraries are set up.

Q: The INFOMAT has not been used to any extent, to my knowledge, elsewhere in the world.

FORSTER: I think they tried to apply this and it didn't work in Germany. You do find modified aspects of the system at many of our posts and the DRS system is widely used I believe and is working well with some modifications.

Q: Not to the exclusivity that it was under Al Carter?

FORSTER: No. That is gone. I believe Rob Nevitt, who is in Tokyo now as PAO, has a very solid approach to communication. I understand he is running a very fine program there and while he sees the advantages of the distribution record system (DRS) he also sees the advantages of flexibility and will use whatever system works well for him in managing the program. Having gone through these philosophical differences of opinion in the past, which have been very healthy, I do feel strongly that you cannot look at people as numbers. Each person requires a certain kind of approach and treatment. It sounds simplistic, Lew, but there's a tendency, when you have too much of a systematized approach, and the person you are trying to reach suddenly becomes a "file" or a "target" that you lose something in the deeper communication process. The whole thing begins to lose meaning. At least that's my own view.

Q: So you left Japan for the last time.

FORSTER: Yes. That was the end of those great years in Japan, very educational years for me, one era after another, and, indeed, you also were there for some time. But Japan, to me, will always be the country I remember the most with USIA, and the Japanese people will always be very special. My only hope now is that we can get over this period, on both sides, of economic tension, "bashing," I guess they call it now, and try and achieve what Ambassador Mike Mansfield used to refer to as a "tap 'er light" approach. I think we've all got to "tap 'er light," to keep the lid on emotional rhetoric which may start to split us again if it continues. So much was accomplished since 1945 and I think we can all be very proud of our USIS roles. It would be a tragedy to slip back.

Q: We may never get back to the joyous relationship that we had in the "50s and "60s, but let's hope we recapture a lot of it.

FORSTER: That was a very special time.

Q: Where did you go after that?

FORSTER: I had a call from Jock Shirley early one morning in Tokyo. He asked me if I would be willing to come in to take over the area office of East Asia Pacific. Of course, since this is the area where I had started out and I knew most of the gang out there, I said I would indeed be very pleased to do so. So in 1981, we left Tokyo for Washington.

1981: Final Assignment - Director, Office Of East Asia And Pacific Affairs

Q: What was Jock's position at the time he called you?

FORSTER: Jock was then counselor of the Agency working for the new director, Charles Wick, and with the various divisions in the Agency. I had not known Jock all that well before, but I must say his dedication to USIA work and his interest in trying to do things right were most impressive. I had great respect for Jock. He had a lot of integrity.

Q: I interviewed him in late November, and it was very fascinating.

FORSTER: I would think so. Of course, he's so articulate and has had such a variety of experiences. I used to kid Jock about Asia. I used to say, "Jock, you know so much about this world, but you ought to spend more time out our way in Asia. That's another world out there." (Laughter) He was very Europe oriented, as you know.

Q: Especially East Europe.

FORSTER: Yes. Right. I guess all of us were hoping that he would end up as an ambassador there since he certainly had the background and qualifications.

Q: So was that your last assignment?

FORSTER: Yes. I came in to be the area director, and we were off like gangbusters. Charlie Wick wanted to go on his first trip to China, and also to sign the cultural agreement out there and to open the big Boston Museum exhibit. He also wanted to travel all around China taking a number of his colleagues with him. Secretary of Defense Weinberger provided the plane, and we had about 20 or so in the group. I recall that Terry Catherman had taken the director to Europe just before that, and I had him for his second trip to China. Everything was moving along very smoothly in those days with China and from Beijing I accompanied the director to Shanghai and Guangzhou (Canton) as well as Kweilin.

I then scheduled my first PAO conference in Manila, and that is where we all met for the first time with Wick as a group.

It was an interesting time for us, in many ways, as area directors, because, as you may know, a number of changes were instituted by Wick like the WorldNet program. There was also some question about continuing the Fulbright program at one point which the area directors resisted. We felt it would be a disaster if we were to reduce that program in any way. Then we had this effort to cut back on our posts, which we again resisted.

I believe after a while, thanks to Jock Shirley's strong support, that Wick began to realize he had a very impressive program out there in the field and excellent officers to work with. But it took a while for him to come to that realization, which is understandable, since he was coming in from an entirely different environment, the private sector, and USIS operations were new to him. From then on he wanted to attend all the conferences in the field "to be with his PAOs."

Q: That wasn't the famous trip to Japan, was it, in which he sent out his notorious instruction to get him an armored car and permission to carry a pistol with him?

FORSTER: Oh, no. (Laughter) No, that was later due to his concern about security in general.

Q: And a police escort.

FORSTER: That was also later. Security was not a major concern on that first trip.

The Director and I had our differences but I think all the area directors at the time held firm on what they felt had to be done. He always challenged you. I certainly did not agree with some of the things he was doing, and he knew it. So the last two years in USIA we were down to the wrestling mat several times. Sometimes you were up. Sometimes you were down. He did bring in the extra funding and we were grateful for that, although again we differed on the ways we felt it should be spent.

Q: Can you think of any particular highlights of your tour as the area director, outside of the trip to China?

FORSTER: On the return from China we were confronted with requests for major cuts in the program and it looked like we might lose some of our smaller posts. Holding those posts together, just making sure that we kept our posts there, that was one achievement I felt very happy about. And our trip to China led to a number of important developments with the establishment of new posts such as Shenyang and Chengdu. We were doing a lot of work then to open up in China meeting with Chinese officials constantly to implement the Cultural Agreement we had signed earlier in Beijing.

It was a productive time and we were very fortunate to have such an able staff in Beijing under John Thompson. I should also mention the superb work of Virginia Loo Farris and George Beasley who held down our China desk in the Area office. Like John, they spoke Mandarin fluently and had excellent contacts with the Chinese working long hours to help set up the new posts and to launch our cultural program in China. It was also helpful to have Arthur Hummel, a former USIA officer and our PAO in Burma, as the US Ambassador to China during this time. It was also during this period, incidentally, that we were able to strengthen the Fulbright program in China and the first grantees did an outstanding job.

Those were some of the major USIA developments during a period of relative calm in Asia. The situation was beginning to worsen in the Philippines under Marcos and some of us could see that coming. I personally felt we were getting too close to Marcos and his administration, and it didn't seem right to me. I expressed this view to the director several times. The Philippine situation worried me very much. Meanwhile, in Indochina we followed the Cambodian situation with great concern. I just hope that gets resolved soon somehow. There was no real change in Korea except for the student demonstrations which did result in the fire bombing of the Pusan center.

In Japan, Mike Mansfield continued his good work building up a solid foundation of respect among the Japanese. Dave Hitchcock followed me as PAO and did extremely well there. Jerry Inman was his deputy and he certainly is one of our best officers.

Burma, my old post, was still in bad economic shape at the time although it was gradually opening up and the program could sustain itself, but it was not easy. Here in Hawaii we reinstated the USIA position at CINCPAC and sent in a very able officer, John Fredenburg, who later went to Burma in time for the student uprisings and the subsequent government-led massacres.

Q: He was one of my JOTs in Thailand.

FORSTER: One of the best. John was just super. I should also mention that I had a great team in the East Asia office with Rob Nevitt as my deputy and Dennis Donahue as policy officer. Dick Stephens was our exec officer. The desk officers were also first class. Pat Hodai had the Southeast Asia desk. He later became personnel officer for Asia/Pacific. Phil Harley, who had served with me in Japan for some time, was my personnel officer before Pat and was another able young officer. Ken Olsson, who did a fine job in Fukuoka, was my Japan/Korea desk officer. He is now in Japan as information officer. So I felt that the area was in very good hands, and it was time to say "sayonara" and head out to Hawaii with Nancy, who had just been offered a very special job to establish the International Baccalaureate Program in this State for the first time. After following me around for almost 40 years to all these exotic places, I figured it was her turn and I would follow her for a change and carry the bags. Also, I wanted to try my hand at writing and looked forward with Nancy to some traveling to places we had not visited.

1983: Retirement

Q: You retired in what year? 1983?

FORSTER: I retired in the summer of '83, and it was right here in Honolulu where I announced my retirement at a PAO conference. It was at that conference that I announced I would be signing off and that Rob Nevitt would be taking over the Area office on my departure. It was a sad farewell, but I was glad that it was taking place in the Pacific close to Asia rather than in Washington.

Q: No regrets?

FORSTER: I think there will always be some regrets which I guess many of us have experienced. USIA was our "way of life" for so long and it was hard to break away although I felt the time had come. They were exciting and challenging times in those years of great change following the war and we were fortunate to have worked with so many special people abroad, not only our own staffs but with the many contacts we made in the different countries where we were privileged to serve. It was a very special career.

Q: I think most USIA officers feel this way.....

FORSTER: And there are such good officers going out there now, all of them so well-trained and with linguistic ability. I think if I had any problems with the organization in recent years-and you and I have already hit on this-it has been a case of too much emphasis on the technology of it, not enough on personal relations. Again that sounds very simplistic, but you know what I mean. There was a tremendous enthusiasm and involvement, a real sense of mission which I sometimes find missing now.

Q: Yes.

FORSTER: I think the money that went into WorldNet, for example, and what they got out of it, if that had only gone more into people, into programs really involving us with direct contact with our audiences overseas, certainly more of it into libraries, the kind of libraries you and I have been talking about and more into center operations and exchanges. This would have made far more sense in my view.

Q: WorldNet was Charlie Wick's baby, and he was going to ride herd on it.

FORSTER: Right

Q: Which he did.

FORSTER: Which he did, indeed.

Q: Thank you so much, Cliff.

FORSTER: Thank you, Lew.

Q: This has been a very interesting interview, and I want to thank you for taking the time to give it.

FORSTER: Well, it's been such a lovely day out here and I think we're ready to go for a swim now.

Q: Okay. Let's call it a day.

FORSTER: Thank you, Lew.

Q: Thank you.

End of interview